A Packaged, Full-Strength Mystery:

The Pursuit of Ideas in the AP Studio Art Sustained Investigation

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Abstract

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The Sustained Investigation is a student-directed body of work completed as a requirement of the AP Studio Art (APSA) course. This work involves three audiences: students themselves, their teachers, and AP readers who evaluate their portfolios. Students must consider not only the personal meaning and relevance of their work, but the extent to which that significance can or should be communicated to these outside viewers. Teachers are faced with a related challenge: to guide students through work that is essentially self-defined. The purpose of this research was to document teacher, student, and reader descriptions of the pursuit of worthwhile ideas as they relate to the perceived goals and purposes of the Sustained Investigation. This research was undertaken as a collective case study involving interviews of APSA teachers and students across four school sites, as well as a selection of readers. Findings indicate that the term *idea* might describe a range of approaches to organizing a body of work, including themes, concepts, political stances, feelings, and other sources or motivations. Furthermore, this work often reflects multiple concurrent ideas, involving primary and secondary goals for one's work. The development of ideas was often linked to a nonlinearity of practice; ideas were clarified through the process of making rather than beforehand. Respondents indicated that ideas should be meaningful to the creator, largely relating meaning to personal relevance. Meaning might be pursued by selecting topics of personal significance, developing individual creative processes, or reflecting on this experience as an opportunity to fully embody

the role of artist. Meaningful ideas were differentiated from successful ones. Notions of success were defined in terms of the degree of internally and externally imposed challenge involved in this endeavor. Participants agreed that students should be considered the primary audience for their own work. For some students, awareness of readers motivated them to take on challenging work, but this awareness did not influence their choice of central ideas. The findings of this study, particularly the nuance in distinctions between idea, meaningful idea, and successful idea, may be useful in informing pedagogical and creative practice in the AP program and beyond.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES

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Mom, this is for you.

A.L.C.

Chapter I

INTRODUCTION

Introduction to the Problem

> *A concentration is a body of related works based on an individual's interest in a particular idea expressed visually. It focuses on a process of investigation, growth, and discovery.*
>
> *In this section, you are asked to show, in depth, your personal commitment to a specific visual idea or mode of working. You are required to present an aspect of your work or a specific project in which you have invested considerable time, effort, and thought. The evaluators are interested not only in the work you present, but also in visual evidence that you have thought out and pursued a particular project or way or working.*
>
> *Whether your concentration includes a relatively small number of works or a greater number, the works should be unified by an underlying idea that has visual coherence.*
>
> *You will be asked to write brief statements in response to the following:*
> *1. Briefly define the nature of your concentration project*
> *2. Briefly describe the evolution of your concentration and the sources of your ideas.*
>
> (College Board, 1995)

As a senior in high school in 1996, I submitted a portfolio as a part of the Advanced Placement Studio Art (APSA) course. While other AP courses culminate in a final exam that may be used to confer college credit, APSA students earn this credit by submitting a portfolio of artwork for external review. At that time, the portfolio was structured in three sections: Quality (a selection of the student's best work), Breadth (a collection of works demonstrating mastery of a range of techniques and approaches), and the Concentration, described above. The program offered these portfolio guidelines as a substitute for a course curriculum—that is, students were

to produce a portfolio of the appropriate number of pieces arranged in the appropriate categories, but there were no prescribed assignments or directions as to how they were to get there.

My own Concentration had to do with portraiture; if I gave it a more defined focus than that, I have since forgotten what it was. In a few drawings, I experimented with limited or dramatic lighting, drawing in white chalk on dark paper. In other pieces, I employed mixed-media approaches to experiment with effects that could be achieved by mixing wet and dry materials. Once, I blindfolded a friend and drew her like that. I am not sure why; I think I just liked the way it looked. I wanted to make visually interesting and technically refined work, as these had been the goals of all of my high school artmaking. If I gave any thought to the conceptual development of this body of work—in using the portraits to explore or convey certain ideas—those were secondary concerns.

Figure 1

Amy Charleroy, High School Portrait

The absence of the conceptual component was not completely lost on me, however. The portfolio instructions above were printed on the back of a poster of high-scoring student art from the previous year, and this poster was hung on the wall of my high school art room. Those images embedded themselves so deeply in my brain that when I saw the poster again almost 20 years later, I had a sudden shock of recognition—*oh, it's you!*—even though I had not thought of the poster in ages. As a 17-year-old, I had been so riveted by the artwork because it seemed to be some kind of key: these students had figured it out, even if I did not know what *it* was. They made visually stunning work, but it was work that was also *about* something. They were on their way to being real artists, and I wanted to understand what they knew.

In 2018 the title of the *Concentration* had changed to the *Sustained Investigation*, but the spirit of the endeavor remained intact: students were to submit images of a body of work reflecting the visual investigation of a particular line of inquiry. The guidelines for the Sustained Investigation appear below.

> *Sustained Investigation (Concentration): A body of related works that demonstrate sustained and thoughtful investigation of a specific visual idea (12 images, some of which may show details, second views, or process documentation; "works" can include fully resolved images and forms as well as sketches, models, plans, and diagrams)*
>
> *When working on your Sustained Investigation section, define your idea early in the year so the work you submit has the focus required for a Sustained Investigation. Use the prompts below to write a concise description of your Sustained Investigation idea.*
>
> *1. Clearly and simply state the central idea of your concentration.*
> *2. Explain how the work in your concentration demonstrates your intent and the Sustained Investigation of your idea. You may refer to specific images as examples.*
> (College Board, 2018)

That same year, I viewed the APSA portfolio from a much different vantage point than I had two decades earlier: I work at the College Board, where I am the director of curriculum and instruction for a Pre-AP sequence of study in the arts. This role has involved defining the key

skills and habits that are essential to success in AP or introductory-level college arts courses and developing frameworks for instruction in middle and high school arts courses that aim to scaffold the development of these abilities over time. Even more consequentially, however, after working at the College Board for nine years, in 2019—the academic year associated with the portfolio guidelines above—I became the interim director of the AP course. At this point, the course title was shifting from AP Studio Art to AP Art and Design (APAD), and a fully revised and updated set of portfolio requirements and scoring rubrics were about to be released into the world. Although the Sustained Investigation has remained a part of the portfolio structure, it is currently described and evaluated on slightly different terms:

> *This section... offers students the opportunity to make and present works of art and design based on an in-depth investigation of materials, processes, and ideas done over time. It involves practice, experimentation, and revision... [and] is expected to demonstrate skillful synthesis of materials, processes, and ideas.*
>
> *Along with each work, students are required to submit written responses to prompts about the work. The most successful responses in terms of assessment are those that are clearly related to the images; [those] that directly and completely address the prompts; and that provide evidence of inquiry-based Sustained Investigation through practice, experimentation, and revision.*
>
> *There is no preferred (or unacceptable) basis of inquiry, type of investigation, or use of material, process, idea, style, or content for the Sustained Investigation.*
>
> *State the following in writing:*
>
> - *Identify the questions or inquiry that guided your Sustained Investigation*
> - *Describe how your Sustained Investigation shows evidence of practice, experimentation, and revision guided by your questions or inquiry* (College Board, 2019)

Whether the language is from 1996, 2019, or any of the years in between, a thread runs through all of the descriptions of the Concentration/Sustained Investigation: students are to identify an idea of interest, and find ways to explore and develop it visually in the creation of a body of work. The language of exactly what this means or what it may look like can be difficult

to pin down. In taking on Pre-AP and AP work, I have naturally become closely familiar with the portfolio requirements and scoring guidelines—perhaps internalizing the rubric and requirement language even more than I internalized those images of successful AP portfolios back in 1996. I have had to grapple, internally and externally, with clarifying what is meant by *investigation* as a visual process, or how one is meant to *synthesize* materials, processes, and ideas. How do we know when inquiry is visually present? What is the relationship between visual and written inquiry; is the work less successful if the portfolio bears little resemblance to the student's written statement? What is the difference between a topic and an investigation? And most importantly, how can we clearly describe the process of artistic investigation to students? Teachers have clearly grappled with the same questions: in the fall of 2019, I planned a series of free webinars to discuss these issues with any interested APAD teachers, shortly after the redesigned requirements and rubrics had been released publicly. In less than a week, more than eight hundred participants registered.

AP portfolio reviewers, referred to as *readers*, detect students' struggles with inquiry-focused work as well.[1] Anecdotally, they have reported that areas of inquiry at the heart of Sustained Investigations are often overly vague or general, and that student work frequently reflects a repetition of a single idea, rather than an ongoing and deepening exploration of that idea. Many ambitious and talented students in 2020 are likely as lost as I was in 1996, wondering how their own work, which may be personally meaningful, can convey the significance of that

[1] AP portfolios—tens of thousands of them—are reviewed during a 10-day period annually by foundation-level college studio art professors, as well as AP teachers, at scoring events called readings. Readings begin with multi-day training events using AP rubrics, to ensure inter-rater reliability. Portfolios are reviewed by section, with at least two readers reviewing each section; as the readings were structured in 2019, portions of a single student's portfolio would be seen by about seven different readers. Students' final scores are structured according to a five-point scale, in alignment with scoring procedures for all AP exams.

meaning to an outside viewer. Teachers are in a difficult position as well: How do you teach someone to get an idea, and then pursue that idea?

The Sustained Investigation presents particular pedagogical and creative challenges, then: teachers must direct or coach students in developing their own independent body of work, while students must determine for themselves the content and processes that will form the basis of this work. This structure presents a marked departure from the assignment-driven work that comprises most high school art curricula, wherein the objectives for student art may be largely teacher-determined. In addition, many students completing a Sustained Investigation are developing a body of work for the first time and must navigate the potential of exploring and visually representing a single line of inquiry over multiple pieces. They must determine what it means, for them, to work as artists: *How do I decide what to make? What makes a good idea? What makes a meaningful idea? Are these the same?* At the same time, they are anticipating or negotiating the values and expectations of two sets of others—teachers and readers—and questioning whether these expectations are at odds with their own.

Teaching the "How" of Process-Oriented Inquiry

Art education literature consistently highlights frameworks for process-oriented artmaking, which certainly have relevance to some aspects of the Sustained Investigation process. In recent years, the field has developed clearer shared language to articulate habits of process and practice that have to do with conceptual development as well as the building of technical skill. Hetland, Winner, Sheridan, and Veneema's (2007) Studio Thinking framework, for example, identifies eight "studio habits of mind" cultivated by artistic engagement, including the ability to *stretch and explore*, *develop craft*, and *engage and persist* in one's work—all qualities central to defining and executing a body of work. Choice-based approaches have

similarly taken hold in the world of art education: the structure and philosophy of Teaching for Artistic Behavior is based on opportunities for broad choice-making as a foundational element of student creative experiences, with the idea that such experiences foster students' abilities to generate ideas, experiment, and problem-solve (Douglas & Jaquith, 2009). Tishman, Jay, and Perkins (1993) describe the role of art education in cultivating thinking dispositions, and the above examples may all be thought of as dispositional approaches, identifying hallmarks and outcomes of quality art education.

There is clearly emerging broad acceptance of the idea that *how* students make something is of equal or greater importance to *what* they make—but teaching the "how" of process-oriented inquiry can be argued to be significantly more challenging than teaching the "how" of material exploration. Frameworks that emphasize process continue to have their limitations, as they do not necessarily provide ample pedagogical guidance for the development of these dispositions: a teacher may recognize the importance of the ability to "engage and persist" in the development of the APSA Concentration without necessarily knowing how to best enable this disposition in his or her students. Likewise, dispositional models refer to idea development and problem-finding but offer little guidance on what may constitute an idea or problem in the first place.

These dispositional and process-focused models often grow out of an interest in facilitating an authentic process of artmaking, allowing students to work as artists do. It has become a popular advocacy move to assert that we teach our students not just to make art, but to *think like artists* (Columbus Museum of Art, 2019; Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, 2010). Interviews with artists, as well as studies of their processes, reveal that these processes can be messy and idiosyncratic, however, and often bear little resemblance to what happens within the structures of a classroom. It seems that if the process of artistic creation is characterized by

anything, it is a sense of not knowing: of working intuitively or in conversation with the work itself, of solidifying the meaning or idea present in a work only through the act of making. When considering this in a classroom context, where we often prioritize knowing and working linearly, the question becomes: how might teachers and students honor, facilitate, and work through that emergent process within a system that is structured and time-bound?

Other contemporary pedagogical models identify key ideas or concepts as the foundational element for student engagement. Instead of focusing primarily on how a work is created, then, what the work is about is what becomes centralized. A visual culture approach to art education expands visual references and examples used in the art room to include works of design and images from contemporary popular culture (Freedman, 2003). By extension, this may expand the possibilities for students to make work of personal significance. Further, these sources, and students' own art, may be examined through the lens of conceptual organizers, such as *power*, *ideology*, or *representation* (Duncum, 2010; Walker, 2001, 2006). Gude (2007, 2013) proposes a series of big ideas as "postmodern principles" for artmaking, arguing that the process of creation should be about investigation of ideas, and should relate directly to the practices of contemporary artists, rather than focusing primarily on the building and refinement of artistic technique. In these examples, such open-ended and idea-centered practice still largely assumes that the educator will be the one to identify the ideas under consideration, even as students may be afforded the opportunity to make all other creative decisions in terms of media, techniques, and processes of production. Guidance on mentoring students in the selection and exploration of personally relevant ideas is less prevalent in this literature.

It is clear, then, that teachers may not be able to discern a clear pedagogical path to preparing students to navigate the Sustained Investigation, but of course, this process is not

necessarily meant to be teacher-driven in the first place. The (ideally) student-directed nature of the Sustained Investigation presents another set of challenges, as students may have priorities or sources of inspiration for their work that are at odds with the preferences of their teachers. If students do not perceive the possibility of making truly meaningful self-directed choices, many become bored with their school-based artmaking, opting to pursue their truly self-driven work outside of the classroom (Burton, 2000). Selecting and pursuing a path of artistic investigation may therefore involve students' weighing their personal interests and aesthetic concerns against their perceptions of what is embraced in the context of the art classroom (Burton & Hafeli, 2012). In the context of the APSA portfolio, this process is further complicated by the fact that student work is being created in order to be evaluated, in an assessment carrying the increasingly valuable reward of potential college credit. In addition to anticipating teacher expectations, students might select their Concentration focus and processes according to their assumptions or perceptions of what will garner the highest score from reviewers.

In many ways, the APSA Sustained Investigation represents the intersection of all of the above pedagogical models, each containing challenges of their own: inquiry is process-oriented, it is student-driven, and it is organized by a central idea or concept. In addition, it represents the intersection of three audiences or sets of stakeholders—teachers, students, and readers—centralizing the question not only of what one's work is *about*, but who is it *for*. The meeting of three sets of priorities is further complicated by each participant's personally held assumptions about the values and priorities that are held by the others.

Problem Statement and Research Questions

The challenges inherent in the Sustained Investigation process lie in defining one's own personally relevant approach to ideation and investigation in artmaking, while simultaneously

addressing the expectations set by an outside audience of educators and evaluators. These challenges are compounded by the understanding that such expectations are often merely implied rather than explicitly stated between teachers and students. Therefore, the purpose of this dissertation was to document teacher, student, and AP reader descriptions of idea-definition and creative investigation in the context of the APSA Sustained Investigation. In particular, the study identified sources of greatest influence and motivation in student approaches to idea-generation and refinement in their Sustained Investigation work, and examined the interplay of these student-defined interpretations and approaches with the hallmarks of worthwhile artistic ideas as described by teachers and APSA portfolio reviewers.

Research Question and Sub-questions

Given that a student artist's process of creating a body of work may be informed by the ability to identify both the content or subject matter of the work and the processes by which it will be created, how do APSA teachers and students define and describe the qualities of a good idea—one that has personal and artistic value—and the processes of exploring that idea, especially in the context of the Sustained Investigation section of their AP portfolios? Specifically:

- How do students describe the formulation and evolution of the ideas present in their work, and which aspects of these ideas and work are most personally meaningful?
- How do teachers describe the process of guiding students in generating and refining ideas in their Sustained Investigation work, and what informs their views on what constitutes a successful idea?
- How do APSA portfolio evaluators (readers) describe the hallmarks of a conceptually rigorous portfolio, and what informs these ideas?

Assumptions

There are two sets of assumptions, listed below, that underpin this study. The first set are assumptions not to be debated, which involve basic understandings of the AP Studio Art course and portfolio structures. The second set of assumptions are assumptions to be debated; these are statements that are likely true for the study's participants, but that might be more variable in each participant's individual experiences.

Assumptions not to be debated:

- There is a common understanding among participants of at least the most basic definition of the AP Studio Art Sustained Investigation: that it is a series of images reflecting the investigation of a singular line of inquiry.
- Work for the APSA Sustained Investigation may take a variety of forms and may be completed within a variety of parameters, but it is assumed that this work is not generated *primarily* in response to assignments set by a teacher. It is assumed that students have a reasonable degree of agency in choosing the subject matter, content, media, and processes with which they work in developing their Sustained Investigations, even if those decisions are made with teacher input.

Assumptions to be debated:

- Respondents are able to articulate their intent for their work, as well as describe their experiences in creating a series of works (students), overseeing this process (teachers), or evaluating student work (readers).
- APSA teachers, students, and readers are able to identify criteria (either personally defined or understood from other sources) for what makes a particular creative idea personally worthwhile.

- The extent of teacher involvement in the development of student Sustained Investigation is variable; the nature of teacher/student interactions may inform or influence the content of the work that the student makes, as well as the processes through which it is produced.
- The structure of the AP Studio Art program constitutes an appropriate framework through which to investigate the development of ideas in largely self-directed student artmaking.

Educational Aims of the Study

The field of art education is becoming ever-more fluent in addressing the full process of artistic production in a classroom setting, inviting students to actively engage in processes of creative ideation, iteration, revision, and reflection, while connecting one's work to the work of other artists and to the world at large. As noted above, this emphasis on inquiry and process creates pedagogical challenges, as educators define classroom routines to facilitate artistic processes one might consider to be intuitive or at least idiosyncratic. To further complicate matters, our terms for describing and defining creative practices are broad; habits of ideation, or reflection, or revision, are understood and enacted very differently in different classroom settings. This dissertation was undertaken with the understanding that there may be great distance, even within a single classroom setting, between teacher and student definitions of a worthwhile artistic idea.

The purpose of this study, then, has been to document the language and personal philosophies or value systems associated with processes of ideation and creative investigation among AP teachers, students, and readers. The presentation of these perspectives on artmaking maps the areas of agreement and dissonance among participants and identifies the range of sources of influence on their preferred processes and creative worldviews. The findings of the

dissertation have implications for the theory and practice of secondary-level art instruction, particularly as it relates to guiding students in undertaking self-defined artistic pursuits.

My intention for the study was to broaden, rather than narrow, creative and pedagogical approaches that relate to this process. That is, the goal of this work was not to arrive at a single framework of most desirable hallmarks of creative ideation and investigation: there is no table presented that outlines the qualities of a "good idea" for artistic pursuit. Rather, as an in-depth examination of what we mean when we describe what it is to conceive of and investigate an idea, this research is intended to expand teacher and student practice or points of view on what constitutes a worthwhile artistic pursuit by inviting them to question previously-held assumptions about the hallmarks of rigor or creative ingenuity in artistic production. Pedagogical and assessment-focused process and philosophy have been examined in this study, in order that the findings of the work can inform and influence those same processes.

Limitations

While there may certainly be other opportunities for high school students to develop an independent (or somewhat independent) body of work, this study focused specifically and exclusively on the process of developing an APSA Sustained Investigation. Even more specifically, it reflects the experiences of teachers, students, and readers engaged in the submission and evaluation process as it existed in the spring of 2019, just prior to the updating of the course materials. The terms used in this research are consistent with program terminology during that time frame: the title of the Sustained Investigation was in place in 2019 (having recently shifted from Concentration), but the title of the course had not yet shifted from AP Studio Art to AP Art and Design. The parameters of the Sustained Investigation provided a helpful frame to lend structure to an inquiry of the ways in which we assign value to particular

modes of thinking and working in the creation of self-directed art. Furthermore, limiting the study to this particular endeavor ensured greater consistency across cases than if the study were addressing self-directed artmaking more generally. All participating students, regardless of site, shared the same challenge of creating a body of work united by a single idea or area of focus.

The study was limited to the documentation and analysis of the ways that teachers, students, and AP readers define and conceptualize ideas and investigation as aspects of artmaking processes. Although these notions have been explored within the particular context of the APSA program, this study was not intended to examine the structure, purpose, or relative value of the APSA portfolio assessment process itself, or to suggest strengths, weaknesses, or possible revisions to the design of this model. Official evaluation rubrics, criteria, and procedures have been described to clarify program expectations, but are further examined according only to the extent to which these criteria were referenced in participant comments on their understanding of and approach to the Sustained Investigation. Similarly, data collection efforts did not involve accessing the portfolio scores earned by participating students; this study made no attempt to correlate student performance with student commentary.

Naturally, there have been limitations to the number of participants in this study as well. Subjects of this study included only individuals who were directly involved in the AP Sustained Investigation process, defined by three roles: students creating a body of work, teachers guiding the creation of that work, and AP representatives charged with evaluating student portfolios. Data collection involved participants across four school sites, including one teacher and three student participants at each site. Four AP readers were interviewed as well. As the AP course is typically considered a culmination of longer-term art involvement, all student participants had taken art courses prior to their APSA experience.

Personal Suitability

This study represents a merging of my professional and scholarly interests. My role at the College Board has been naturally advantageous in the research process; it allowed, for example, for access to research subjects that may have been inaccessible otherwise. Having connections to a large pool of APSA teachers and administrators allowed for more purposeful sampling of study participants.

More significantly, however, the focus of inquiry described here has been deepened and refined by ongoing engagement with the work of the APSA program. The course's former director, as well as advising educators directly involved in the refinement of portfolio guidelines and evaluation criteria, have noted that my research questions echo their own ongoing conversations and concerns about the ways that notions of idea generation, expression, and refinement are dealt with in the program as a whole. The opportunity to attend readings has served to strengthen this research by forcing me to re-examine my own ideas and assumptions about what constitutes rigor or meaning in high school-level arts teaching and learning. To the extent that I had harbored any biases or preferences about what makes one approach to a Sustained Investigation more appropriate, meaningful, or sophisticated than another, these were challenged and struck down again and again upon coming face to face with tens of thousands of portfolios of student work in a Salt Lake City convention center. In looking at student artwork, laid out on long tables in cavernous spaces the size of several football fields, I discovered that I did indeed have assumptions about what constituted a worthwhile subject or idea, and assumptions about students' intentions, or lack of intentions, in creating this work. I found myself questioning and pushing back on these assumptions—*were they perhaps no more than*

personal preferences?—repeatedly. I heard it happening around me too, as readers joked knowingly with one another about the number of Sustained Investigations that seemed to be a vague exploration of "feelings." After initially agreeing, I wondered to myself: what exactly is wrong with exploring feelings? Many great artists have built careers on it, after all; there is certainly a lot of territory to examine there.

Although the APSA leadership and development committee have not directly advised me on any aspect of the design of this study—rather, I have only discussed this work informally with selected members—its findings have the potential to inform their ongoing work in program oversight and refinement.

Chapter Summary

This chapter has introduced the problem at the heart of this study: the inherent challenge of developing a personally relevant body of work in the context of a school-based structure, culminating in an external assessment. The central aspect of this challenge that I have chosen to highlight in this study is the nebulous nature of ideation in artmaking, specifically the question of what constitutes a worthwhile idea for artistic pursuit, and by whose terms this might be defined. I have highlighted contemporary pedagogical models that may inform the Sustained Investigation process, including working with central concepts or big ideas as well as process-driven dispositional models. In doing so, I noted the challenges in these approaches that may also illuminate the challenges inherent in the process of developing a Sustained Investigation. In particular, I have highlighted the idea that the Sustained Investigation represents not only a process or pedagogical challenge, but a communication-based one, as teachers, students, and reviewers may have competing priorities as to what makes an artistic idea rigorous or worth

carrying out, and these priorities may or may not be overtly stated. The following chapter will provide further grounding for this study in the art education literature, framing the Sustained Investigation process as one relating to the work of artists, twenty-first century pedagogy, adolescent artistic development, and the structures and philosophies of the APSA assessment model.

Chapter II

RELATED LITERATURE

This study examined the qualities of artistic engagement, ideation, and meaning-making as they manifest themselves within the very particular context of the APSA Sustained Investigation. Despite the specificity of this inquiry, the background for such a study necessitates a review of the literature that extends beyond an examination of previous studies of adolescent art and artmaking. It is additionally necessary to consider the potential sources of influence that may inform the development of these definitions and value systems, and the ways that they are communicated (or not) in contemporary classrooms. To that end, this review is divided into four sections. The first relates to contemporary artistic practice, highlighting philosophical and research-based understandings of the ways that artists themselves grapple with the development of ideas and meaning in their work. This section also includes a theoretical grounding of artmaking as a process-event characterized by an emergent sense of intent. The second section offers an examination of twenty-first century pedagogical models in art education, particularly dispositional approaches emphasizing the cultivation of artistic behaviors in students, as well as postmodern pedagogy, wherein themes or ideas of contemporary relevance form the foundation for artistic work. The earlier examination of contemporary artistic practice naturally raises the question of whether adolescent artists should be expected to model their work after the processes of professionals, and whether contemporary pedagogy helps or hinders them in this goal. The next section considers adolescent artistic development, particularly highlighting the often-pronounced division between students' own priorities for their work and the imposition of alternate priorities set in formal educational settings. Finally, as this study takes place within the

particular context of the APSA program, an examination of the history and purpose of the portfolio, with particular attention to the concentration/Sustained Investigation, is included. This discussion allows readers to draw connections between the program's goals, artistic practice, and teacher and student priorities.

Idea, Intent, and Artistic Practice

Thinking Like an Artist

Contemporary advocacy measures in art education are commonly linked to the idea of enabling students to "think like artists." In 2010, the Guggenheim Museum hosted a conference titled *Thinking Like an Artist* to discuss the development of problem-solving and creative thinking skills in art classrooms. Lincoln Center released an online video series with the same title, wherein cultural luminaries such as Chelsea Clinton and Deepak Chopra described the ways that arts training contributed to their success and well-being. The Columbus Museum of Art rebranded its educational offerings, with a renewed focus on teaching for creativity and thinking like an artist: in a TED talk that has been viewed more than 600,000 times, education director Cindy Foley defines artistic thought as comfort with ambiguity, idea generation, and transdisciplinary research.

In pilot research that informed the development of this study, both teachers and students spoke about the Sustained Investigation as an artmaking experience that mirrored the experience of working like a "real" artist as well. With that in mind, it is worth examining what we know about artistic process, particularly as it relates to intention and ideation, and to consider what we assume about how it works.

The advocacy-focused conversations described above are often frustratingly removed from in-depth study of the real practices of artists, and it is possible that they force a rationality onto a process that in reality is much harder to describe. This section of the literature review represents an investigation into the ways that artists, researchers, and philosophers describe artistic practice, especially as it relates to the development of intent and meaning in a work, so that these descriptions can later be examined as they relate to the goals of the Sustained Investigation.

Studies of problem-finding and artistic practice. True studies of artistic process are limited, reflect an examination of small sample groups, and are available mostly within the domain of creativity research rather than in the field of art education in particular. Some studies approach an understanding of ideation and problem-definition through documenting the parameters that artists set for themselves to work within. Patricia Stokes (2001, 2014) and Stokes and Fisher (2005) studied the work of well-known artists including Max Beckmann, Philip Guston, Claude Monet, and Chuck Close, through the lens of constraint-finding, examining the frameworks that artists create for themselves to work within. Such constraints might include formal or stylistic considerations, as well as constraints of subject. As a study of creativity, it is important to note that this research assumes that that the mark of a successful body of work is its originality. “When people can do anything, they do what has been most successful in the past,” Stokes and Fisher noted, which makes them more “prolific” than creative (2005, p. 355). A truly creative artist, in the researchers’ view, is one that continually adapts and redefines their practice in response to emerging ideas and questions.

Getzels and Csikszentmihalyi (1976) examined processes of problem-finding among artists not by analyzing the work and commentaries of professional artists, but by organizing an

original experiment with college art students. The students were invited to arrange and draw a still life, while researchers observed and interviewed them about their processes. Subjects were given the directive that "the important thing is that the drawing should be pleasing to you" (p. 85). This detail is notable, as it frames the problem-finding process in terms of creating something of personal value. From the data, the authors identified a series of behaviors that emerged at different points in the process: at the problem *formulation* stage, students examined and manipulated the still-life objects before selecting a few. At the problem *solution* stage, which commenced the moment the students actually began drawing, students engaged in exploratory activity—perhaps sketching several versions of the still life before selecting one to continue with—making changes to the drawing, and maintaining flexibility in relation to the goal or process that one had originally decided upon for their work.

Mace (1997) later argued that Getzels and Csikszentmihalyi were not truly studying problem finding at all, because the task given to students was not open-ended; the researchers defined the problem for them by prescribing the subject matter and medium within which they would work. In an attempt to do similar research within less artificial conditions, Mace (1997) and Mace and Ward (2002) completed a series of two studies wherein working artists were interviewed about the process of making their own independent work, with an emphasis on questions about problem-finding and concept refinement. They identified four stages of problem-finding: artwork conception, idea development, making the artwork, and finishing the artwork/resolution. Additionally, they identified three primary sources from which ideas arise: the artist's existing work and process, one's own life experience, and other external influences. They further noted that ideas may arise from these sources through an explicit, directed routine of problem-finding, or through more implicit means, wherein ideas seem to surface "without any

apparent source and seemingly unintentionally" (p. 184)—which certainly echoes the comments made by artists above—and that problem-finding was an ongoing process of decision-making throughout the creation of a work of art, not just at its initial inception. When deciding whether an idea had merit, artists tended to base their criteria on whether it was personally relevant, or perhaps if it was an extension of other work that the artists had already completed. In defining the various stages or phases of problem-finding in artmaking, Mace and Ward noted that abandoning one's work is always a possible component of the idea development and actual creation of the piece, and built this possibility into the model of the problem-finding processes of artists. These pieces of data present an interesting comparison to the above-mentioned writing of Stokes. As a creativity researcher, she assumed originality to be the most important goal for artists, but studies of artistic practice indicate that artists themselves are more likely to cite the creation of personal meaning or value as their central reason for making work. It is not only educators, but also researchers who impose their own value systems onto their work.

Moving beyond the concept of problem finding to examine other qualities of the creative experience, Banfield and Burgess (2013) conducted a small study of seven professional artists which sought to determine aspects of "optimal experience" in artmaking—a term referencing the work of Csikszentmihalyi (1990), describing the state of flow, or full immersion in an activity with which one is engaged. The authors found that optimal artistic experience related to aspects of enjoyment, immersion, and a sense of challenge in one's work. Artists described elements of process as well: an experimental approach to one's work correlated with optimal experiences, as did the relationship of the body to the materials and artwork—the sensation of one's tools being an extension of his or her own body, for example. Finally, they identified existential elements of practice that contributed to optimal experience: the creation (once again) of meaning through the

practice of artmaking, the presence of a sense of vitality while working—the sense of the artwork "as an active player in the artistic process" (p. 79)—as well as the establishment of a sense of identity as a creator. Related to this sense of identity, the artists highlighted the role of outside feedback and recognition in contributing to optimal experience as well.

Considering Intention

Here, it is worth considering the distinction between problem-finding or problem definition and considering an intention or purpose for one's work. Beardsley (1965) posited that the creative process can be conceptualized in two ways. One is to consider that the artist's purpose in creating a work is to clarify an emotion. This certainly brings the notion of intention or will into tighter focus, linking it with an act of expression, but he simultaneously expressed skepticism as to whether art can truly aid its creator in considering or expressing emotions at all. Another view, he reasoned, might be to think of creativity as problem solving, except that thinking of art in terms of problems can be, in itself, problematic. A painting is not really a problem, although its coming into being does require a fair amount of decision making on the part of the artist.

One might question whether emotional expression or visual problem-solving are truly the only elements of creative intent. Likewise, we might wonder whether the act of mapping intention in this way does not impose logic and order onto a process that is less easily defined in experience. Livingston (2005) noted a tendency among some theorists to address the concept of intention in ways that might force a sort of linearity or rationalism onto the process that does not truly exist. In an online article for *The Guardian*, writer George Saunders (2017) expressed a similar idea:

> We often discuss art this way: the artist had something he "wanted to express", and then he just, you know … expressed it. We buy into some version of the intentional fallacy: the notion that art is about having a clear-cut intention and then confidently executing same. The actual process, in my experience, is much more mysterious and more of a pain in the ass to discuss truthfully.

Artists' words as a window into intention. In order to ground a discussion of intention in a truer understanding of the habits and thought patterns of artists, the most useful sources may be the words of artists themselves, and their comments on the development of ideas and meaning in their work. In the absence of any large-scale studies of the development of artistic ideas and meaning, I reviewed dozens of collected interviews with artists to determine whether any generalizations could be made regarding their processes of idea definition and the cultivation of meaning. These sources allow a window into the range of ways artists work their way into meaning, but illuminate the challenges inherent in describing the creative process. Often artists themselves cannot fully articulate why or how they chose to work in a certain way, and there are few aspects of process that could be generalized to apply to all artists. Within the context of enormously varied studio habits and processes, however, one can detect a few similar threads of philosophy or practice that lead to the development of ideas or meaning in one's work. Specifically, these can be thought of as: following one's intuition, setting constraints or parameters to work within, and responding to one's environment (including the work of other artists).

Intuition. Susan Sontag (1965) described a work of art as "the objectifying of the will in a thing or performance" (p. 31), and such language suggests a level of certainty and decisiveness on the part of the artist that other writers (and artists themselves) have called into question. As a viewer, it can be easy to think of a work as an embodiment of an artist's decisive will, when we

are faced only with the completed and fully formed thing. In contrast, artists' descriptions of process often reveal only a vague notion of an initial "will" during the early stages of creation.

In conversation with Calvin Tomkins (2008), photographer Cindy Sherman explained that "I'll just sit there and ham it up... looking in the mirror to see what works" (p. 44). Tomkins further described that:

> The character emerges through the process. Sherman has described that process as 'trancelike,' and it can take a very long time. When it works, there is a moment when 'something else takes over' and the character comes to life, but even then she doesn't know exactly what it's going to look like on film. 'My way of working is that I don't know what I'm trying to say until it's almost done.' (p. 44)

Marisol similarly relied on almost unconscious choice-making: "I don't think much myself. When I don't think, all sorts of things come to me" (Currey, 2019, p. 10). Keith Haring also described his drawing process as "more like automatic drawings or gestural abstraction" (Stiles & Selz, 2012, p. 427), while sculptor Anne Truitt (1982) wrote of ideas that came to her seemingly out of nowhere: "Just as I wake up, a series of three sculptures may present themselves somewhere that seems high over my head in my consciousness. Sometimes a single piece will appear; never more than three at once" (p. 91). While Truitt's sculptural ideas appear to arrive fully formed, Francis Bacon noted the balance between planned and spontaneous choices: "I don't start blind. I have an idea of what I would like to do, but as I start working, that completely evaporates" (Peppiatt, 2012, p. 31). Julie Mehretu noted the significance of ideas that cannot be fully articulated: "Even before I can intellectualize [a new work], there's usually a vision or some gesture in my mind of what I want to start investigating. It's not necessarily something I can understand on an intellectual level, but I'll follow that inspiration" (Zuckerman, 2017, p. 166). Similarly, Diane Arbus described working on something simply because the idea would not leave her alone: "I do what gnaws at me" (Currey, 2019, p. 16).

Constraint-setting. Some artists discuss configuring formal or process-based constraints as a "way into" a work, rather than starting with a concept or a vague beginning of an idea. Jasper Johns famously noted that his process is to "Take an object. Do something to it. Do something else to it" (Stiles & Selz, 2012). Helen Frankenthaler reported that

> I will sometimes start a picture feeling 'What will happen if I work with three blues and another color, and maybe more or less of the other color than the combined blues?' And very often midway through the pictures I have to change the basis of the experience. (Stiles & Selz, p. 31)

Daily work routines are a form of constraint-setting as well: in a series of interviews with artists in their studios, writer Sarah Trigg (2013) noted ritual as a common theme in the process of idea-generation. Artist Christy Gast reported to her that "every day when I come in [to my studio], I work on something I've already started, and I start something new" (p. 54). Gerald Davis has a writing ritual: "I always have a piece of paper on the wall where I write my thoughts. I fill it up and then put another one up: I really try not to edit anything. That's where I get my ideas" (p. 71). Sometimes the ritual involves collecting items of interest: Trenton Doyle Hancock told Trigg that "cultural detritus serves as an inspiration for me. So I'm at thrift shops and garage sales and flea markets pretty much all the time—gathering" (p. 56).

Other artists as sources of influence. Artists often talk about drawing on the work of other artists as inspiration, not out of an interest in working imitatively, but in rather in order to take and transform some quality of the work of their peers or predecessors. Frankenthaler discussed the influence of Pollock on her paintings (Stiles & Selz, 2012), while Romare Bearden described being inspired by the "flat paintings" of Byzantine painters, but combining this aesthetic with the aesthetic of documentary film. Tomkins (2008) described painter Julian Schnabel's sudden moment of inspiration when seeing Gaudi mosaics in the Parc Guell in Barcelona:

> ‘After seeing those,’ he told me, ‘I went to some restaurant that had a crummy mosaic on the wall, a white mosaic, and I thought, Shit, I’m going to break a bunch of plates and then use them as the surface of a painting. I went to the Salvation Army and bought a bunch of plates. The plates seemed like light,’ he recalled, ‘and when you drew a line on them the line had a different depth of field from the plates. The work had its own body and dynamic, it didn’t have anything to do with anyone else’s work, and it was asking me to make other versions. (pp. 58-59)

The emergence of meaning; being in conversation with one’s work. While Beardsley set up fairly distinct criteria for how intent is conceptualized—it is either expressing an emotion or solving a problem—he went on to admit that “The main question is simply, ‘What do I do next?’” (p. 295). It is in the repeated negotiation of this question that the artist may identify and clarify both the form and the meaning of a work, through the process of making. Carroll (2007) similarly clarified between *plan* and *intention*, defining intention as “an executive attitude toward a plan,” which suggests a degree of flexibility of thought while carrying out the work (p. 395).

In addition to being in conversation with the work of artists, then, sometimes creative projects emerge as a conversation between the artist and the work itself. In both cases, meaning is emergent. This ongoing responsiveness and reflection in practice may be similar to the idea of intuition described above, but it also encompasses an ability to be flexible, and to allow one’s work to go in new and unanticipated directions. Eisner (2004) cited John Dewey in referring to this as “flexible purposing”—the idea that the purpose of a work may change in response to new possibilities that emerge as the work progresses. This habit of reflection also establishes that idea generation does not just happen at the outset of a work; it is ongoing. Artist Ann Hamilton wrote that

> One doesn’t arrive—in words or in art—by necessarily knowing where one is going. In every work of art something appears that does not previously exist, and so, by default, you work from what you know to what you don’t know. You may set out for New York, but you may find yourself, as I did, in Ohio. You may set out to make a sculpture and find that time is your material.” (2009, p. 68)

Joan Mitchell noted that this reflection takes time and attention. She questioned the entire concept of "action" painting as it related to her work, arguing that "[t]here's no 'action' here. I paint a little. Then I sit and look at the painting, sometimes for hours. Eventually the painting tells me what to do." (Currey, 2019, p. 134) Mark Bradford said of his work:

> I don't start off thinking that I'm going to make a painting really pop and have energy, I just start working. Sometimes they get a little darker; sometimes they get a little bit more turbulent. They tell me what's going on with me. And sometimes I don't like it. (Zuckerman, 2017, p. 73)

Danto (1991) applied an examination of style and intention to the work of painter Jennifer Bartlett, describing Bartlett's style as something that "emerges through her work as the work develops, and which we can finally discern in the earlier work where it was occluded by surrounding noises in the artworld" (pp. 207-208). In other words, while an artist's intention for a single work may be something that is defined and clarified through negotiation with the work itself as it is produced—as it seemed to be for Bradford, above—an artist's signature style is similarly developed somewhat intuitively over time, and is something that can only be defined through the act of building a body of work. Danto noted that style is something that can only be defined in retrospect: we can look at someone's early work and see elements of an emergent style that later crystallized.

The deciphering of a work's meaning may evolve in a similar manner to its style—that is, over time, and in a process that sometimes makes sense only in retrospect. Rob Pruitt said, "I don't quite understand myself – not in any huge way – but what pleases me is to make something that takes between six weeks and six months to figure out exactly what it means or what I've done." (Zuckerman, 2017, p. 201) Referring to one of his paintings, John Currin said, "People came into my studio and said, 'wow, that's a beautiful painting.' It had a strange life I hadn't

gotten before. But at first it didn't have such meaning for me. I liked it a lot, but I didn't know why I was making it" (Tomkins, 2008, p. 219).

Formal and conceptual concerns are somewhat separate issues—knowing *what* you are making and knowing *why* you are making it are two different things—but they can become intertwined in this ongoing process of building a work. Wollheim (2015) notes that artists often negotiate multiple intentions simultaneously and that "a confluence will occur between a meaning and, say, a purely 'formal' intention" (p. 93). Similarly, the tension between the notion of working according to a plan versus creating on a more intuitive level presents a false dichotomy: in reality, this is often not an either/or scenario, it is both/and. Livingston held this perspective, noting that "An artist's spontaneous creative moments and more deliberate artmaking activities are functionally related" (2005, p. 32).

The Necessity of Not-Knowing

In the above literature on artistic process and "intention"—a word that, as noted, seems to connote the idea of a plan or purpose—the continued references to intuition, and of an emergent purpose or meaning, foreground the notion of *not knowing* or of feeling one's way through the process as a hallmark of contemporary artistic practice. Writer and artist Emma Cocker (2013) emphasized the value of this state of uncertainty, arguing that "not knowing is an active space within practice" which allows for engagement with new ideas, and that the resulting work will ideally continue to reflect elements of that unknown quality (p. 127). In order to achieve this, then, artists might aspire to retain aspects of not-knowing, both in terms of information and of the materials and processes of artistic practice (Fortnum, 2013).

Considering the not-known in the context of the Sustained Investigation in particular invites one to contend with whether there is space for the embrace of such active uncertainty in

AP classrooms. Artist and academic Rebecca Fortnum noted that formal educational structures often place value on one's ability to state what is known. Further, such certainty often guides professional artistic practice as well, requiring the ability to articulate the intent or meaning of one's work for the purposes of preparing proposals or acquiring funding for projects. "It appears faith has been lost," she lamented," in the legitimacy of art practice as a mode of enquiry in itself" (Fortnum, 2013, p. 77).

By extension, if intention cannot or has not been expressed, does that make the work less successful or meaningful? John Currin's inability (or lack of interest) in articulating the meaning or purpose of his work does not, of course, mean the work is meaningless. Davies (2000), in an altogether different discussion on the conceptualization of non-Western art, reasoned that, even when intentions are not directly stated, it does not mean that they do not exist. He noted that work may be created in the first place without articulating any real reason for making it, but if this work were presented in comparison with something else, the artists could likely describe the purpose and meaning of their own work as it relates to this other example. Exploring a similar theme from a different perspective, artist and writer David Salle (2016) expressed dismay at the idea that in the world of contemporary art, intention overshadows everything else:

> Critical writing in the last forty or so years has been concerned primarily with the artist's intention, and how that illuminates the cultural concerns of the moment... the artist's intent is given far greater importance than is his or her realization, than the work itself. In my view intentionality is not just overrated; it puts the cart so far out in front that the horse, sensing futility, gives up and lies down in the street. (p. 2)

Salle clearly has a strong point of view on the matter of intention: namely, that the artist's intention should presumably be of little relevance to anyone but the artist, and even then, it cannot overshadow the work itself; what a work of art is *about* cannot be considered with greater care than what it *is*.

Artmaking as a process-event. This balance between having a plan, however vague, and working intuitively contributes to an understanding of works of art as ever-emerging and -evolving. Art educators and researchers Richardson and Walker (2011) explored artmaking as a *process-event* in the context of college-level art production. They used this term as a way of acknowledging a gap in contemporary visual arts pedagogy, specifically that art educators like to highlight the importance of process, but then they do not spend significant time unpacking with students what process really is or what it means. Process here is framed as an event, in terms described in the work of Deleuze and Guattari: events are not singular or linear and time-bound but rather reflect the coming together of experiences and relationships; process "refers not to an identifiable memorable or significant occurrence, but rather to a multiplicity of relationships in constant flux at the intersection of thought and action" (2011, p. 9). The act of artmaking, then, cannot be understood in terms of a singular act of creation at a singular moment in time; the act of creation reflects the coming together and transformation of multi-layered relationships and understandings. This transformation relates to communication in that materials, ideas, or understandings change one another when brought into contact, but it would be a mischaracterization to think of this communication is a straightforward and linear transfer of information (Williams, 2011). In the event of artmaking, the teacher role may enable or interfere with the process of artmaking. In understanding the act of creation as an event, the artist is a participant and a catalyst for the layers of interactions taking place and is being transformed by the process: the act of making is a process of becoming (Garoian, 2012; Richardson & Walker, 2011)

This philosophical approach reframes the state of not-knowing as one of acknowledging the event of artmaking, and of attempting to enable the connections and transformations that are

taking place. Similar ideas have been framed in terms of working with the unconscious. In Jasper Johns's outlining of a formal procedure (take an object, do something to it, etc.), this constraint-setting may be thought of as retaining a focus on the formal so that the conceptual can emerge in an organic, and somewhat mysterious, way (Walker, 2009). Walker shared Ann Hamilton's acknowledgement that in her practice, the process of research is a way of allowing other processes to unfold on their own: "it's like you set up a process that allows these issues to rise to the surface. And as my research takes its own path it almost forms an organism within which each project occurs (Walker, 2009, p. 80). Even when artistic intention seems primarily concerned with formal rather than conceptual concerns, then, artists may be focusing on the formal in order to deliberately enable the conceptual to emerge; it is capitalizing on the state of not-knowing and using it to one's creative advantage.

Twenty-first Century Pedagogy and Art as Investigation

If the challenges inherent in producing an APSA Sustained Investigation are viewed as an indicator of some sort of deficiency in contemporary arts education practice, this arises from an assumption that the goal of secondary-level art education is to prepare students to be able to produce such work. It is possible, however, that teaching and learning practices in visual art, as influenced and informed by the history of art education, are out of line philosophically and pedagogically with this expectation. Twentieth century art education saw classroom practice vacillate between traditional approaches to creative production, focusing primarily on formal elements of artmaking, and progressive approaches, placing the student's ideas and interests at the center of creative practice (Stankiewicz, 2000). Efland (1990) noted this tension in an era when goals associated with technical mastery appeared to dominate classroom practice:

> In this century, the conflict in art education has been between those intent upon teaching the content of art and those seeing it as self-expression. In the name of self-expression children were frequently left to their own devices and were denied access to knowledge that could enlighten their personal investigations of art. And yet, in the insistence upon teaching art techniques or the names and dates of art styles, or the elements and principles of design, one might easily lose touch with art as it enables human beings to realize their spirit and their destiny in the actions and products of the imagination. (p. 263)

The Sustained Investigation (or Concentration) has been a required APSA portfolio component since the program's inception in the early 1970s; it has weathered the push-and-pull of late twentieth century philosophy and pedagogy. AP portfolios are naturally produced within an extraordinary range of classroom environments, where different norms or priorities for artistic production—perhaps more technically- or expressively-oriented—are embraced. Eisner (2002) asserted that classrooms have their own "cognitive cultures" (p. 74) that influence not only the content of student work but the methods of thinking and working by which students arrive at their finished products. When teacher control is at its most pronounced, it might result in what Efland (1976) termed the "school art style:" a method of teaching and learning in the visual arts wherein students are given little agency over their creative choices, and instead produce work that meets a teacher's expectation of what quality work should look like (Wilson & Thompson, 2007).

A case can be made that the tension between the technical versus expressive ends of art educational practice has been eased in recent decades, as classroom practice has expanded to acknowledge these as interdependent goals. Evidence for such a shift is apparent in the National Core Arts Standards, released in 2014, which highlight process-oriented ways of thinking and working. The standards are divided into categories including *creating*, *performing/presenting/producing*, *responding*, and *connecting*. This structure acknowledges both technical and expressive concerns as intrinsic to artistic practice, and additionally de-centers the

use of artistic media and techniques as the most important component (or, indeed, the only component) of artmaking.

This acknowledgement of the interplay of idea and medium in contemporary arts education practice has naturally forced educators, students, and researchers to confront the complexity presented by such an approach. The twenty-first century has seen a rise in research and instructional guidance advocating for a postmodern approach to arts teaching and learning as well as several frameworks for what might be called dispositional models – ideas for structuring artmaking experiences in a way that highlights the cognitive habits that are built through process-oriented art practice.

Postmodern Pedagogy[1]

In the contemporary art classroom, as in the contemporary art studio, there exists a tension, but also a cross-pollination, between formal and conceptual concerns. In contrast to Salle's observation that contemporary art practice values intention over form, Hafeli (2002) noted that high school teachers appeared more comfortable giving students technical guidance than in discussing ideas or concepts being dealt with in their work. Put another way, in "formalizing" intention, we often literally formalize it—focusing far more on emphasizing form and technique in student work than conceptual content. Doing so may constitute a false division between form and meaning, in some cases. Gude (2004) reminded readers that

> Form-based teaching, originating with traditions such as the German Bauhaus and modernist American art educators such as Dow, was not originally conceived of as preliminary to in-depth artistic investigations. When Paul Klee asked students to do a line exercise, it was not because he felt they should learn markmaking before doing more meaningful art. Rather, it was because Klee was excited about the meaning of line. (p. 8)

[1] In terms of the contemporary art world, artistic practice can be argued to have moved well beyond postmodernism. I have opted to frame contemporary art educational practice in reference to postmodernism in order to remain consistent with terminology—for example, Gude's (2004) "Postmodern Principles"—referenced in the art education literature that refer to contemporary pedagogy.

Nevertheless, she acknowledged that the centralization of the elements of art and principles of design in many twenty-first century art classrooms has little to do with meaning-making, and Gude herself advocated for an approach to artmaking framed as one of investigation, to be organized, once again, through central, teacher-determined themes or concepts of study and exploration.

A postmodernist approach to studio art instruction argues for active rejection of modernist modes of working, which are focused on development of technical facility and understanding of elements and principles, in favor of engagement with postmodern practice, emulating the processes of contemporary artists, many of whom may not use traditional media at all (Gude, 2007, 2013). Gude argued that such work is more relevant to students' own lives and experiences than work that draws upon non-contemporary examples. To replace the more traditional elements of art and principles of design, she proposed a series of "principles of possibility" to guide contemporary arts instruction, including: forming self, playing, investigating community themes, empowered experiencing, and deconstructing culture. At almost the same time, Barrett (2006) outlined his own framework of principles of postmodernist artmaking, including: collapsing boundaries between high and low, rejecting originality, appropriating, simulating, hybridizing, mixing media, mixing codes, and recontextualizing. Barrett (2011) also highlighted differences between a work's subject matter and meaning—that is, what a piece represents can be different from what it is *about*.

Philosophies and practices in contemporary art education naturally respond to and inform one another: Paul Duncum (2010) responded to Gude with seven principles for visual culture education, a list of themes including power, ideology, intertextuality, multimodality, and others, identified as "sources from which to create curriculum commensurate with the extent and

complexity of today's visually mediated world" (p. 6). Visual culture education—embracing imagery and content from popular culture and students' everyday lives as sources of inspiration for their work—echoes Efland's (1976) and Gude's (2013) rejections of a "school art" style by broadening our notions of acceptable modes of thinking and creating as artists.

In a similar vein, Walker (2004, 2006) discussed the value of concept-based inquiry—in this case, artmaking that is undertaken as a process of investigation guided by Big Ideas and Essential Questions, curricular approaches popularized by the Understanding by Design method (Wiggins & McTighe, 2005). In this structure, problems and prompts may still be posed by the teacher, but are open-ended and relevant to the lives and experiences of students. Big ideas or unifying concepts are not necessarily the subject matter of a student's work: "subject matter," Walker noted, "are the artist's topic, whereas big ideas are the artist's concepts" (2001, p. 3).

It could be argued that such an approach formalizes the process of intention, and the "official task" of finding a novel way to represent notions of *power*, for example overrides the "private" tasks of students' own priorities for their work (Barkan & Hausman, 1956). Even curriculum models that claim to be rooted in the practice of contemporary artists – the curriculum offerings published by *Art:21* are a good example – organize lessons according to unifying themes or ideas such as *boundaries*, *history*, or *fantasy*. Danto (1981) described works of art as having an inherent "about-ness," and it could be reasoned that arriving at the about-ness of a work is the process of articulating intention. As progressive as many postmodern pedagogical practices are in encouraging open-ended exploration with materials, techniques, and ideas, often the about-ness of student work—the central concept or theme—has been predetermined for students.

Returning to the notion of independent artmaking, it is possible that a concept-focused

approach may enable a smoother transition to the creation of self-driven work among students. In a semester-long study of a classroom engaging in concept-based inquiry, Walker (2014) noted that students gradually learned to experiment independently, and that by the end of the semester students were increasingly self-reliant, and that their processes nearly mirrored those of contemporary artists. “The final artifacts for this assignment,” she noted, “showed a deepening understanding of visual metaphor as well as a diverse and imaginative use of materials and processes” (p. 295).

Considering again the idea of cognitive cultures in art classrooms, it might reasonably be argued that postmodernist practice may not dismantle earlier teacher-driven modes of working but has simply replaced one set of expectations with another. It is notable that the metrics of success in Walker’s study above, including use of visual metaphor, working in the modes of contemporary artists, and using materials in diverse or unconventional ways, appear to have been set by the teacher. This observation opens up questions about who determines success in concept-driven or self-driven art more broadly.

Dispositional Models

It has been established that a central concern of twenty-first century arts teaching and learning appears to be relating classroom practice to the work of contemporary artists. Whereas a postmodern approach has at its center an interest in unpacking the ways that artists explore and represent ideas or concepts of personal significance, a dispositional model seeks to highlight and name the range of practices that are the skills of the artist. Art educators have a range of approaches for describing artistic processes to themselves and to students, thereby broadening artistic practice away from a pure focus on the aesthetic qualities of the creative product. In describing processes, we often by extension describe learning in terms of habits of mind

(Hetland, Winner, Veneema, & Sheridan, 2007). The Studio Thinking framework, developed by researchers with Project Zero at the Harvard Graduate School of Education, identifies eight "Studio Habits of Mind" (Develop Craft, Engage and Persist, Envision, Observe, Express, Stretch and Explore, Reflect, and Understand Art Worlds), described as a "hidden curriculum" that is in many ways the "real curriculum" of visual art programs (Hetland et al., p. 4). Tishman, Jay, and Perkins (1993) draw distinctions between "teaching as transmission"—delivering information to students—and "teaching as enculturation"—the creation of a "culture of thinking" in the classroom, identified as such by the cultivation of thinking dispositions as the disposition to "be broad and adventurous," to "clarify and seek understanding," and to "seek and evaluate reasons," among others. Similarly, Patricia James (1997) studied a non-art major's experiences in the art studio, and framed this work in terms of a "systems approach to creativity," wherein "a student who wants to develop as an artist must learn multi-dimensional skills and concepts, including knowledge of the artistic domain, creative thinking skills, and intrinsic motivation" (p. 75).

Postmodern and dispositional approaches are not at odds with one another, but may be thought of as two entry points toward similar goals. Walker (2001), also noted above for advocating for big ideas in art curriculum design, identified elements of artists' practice, including purposeful play, risk-taking, experimentation, postponement of final meaning, and searching or questioning, that may be cultivated through such an approach.

While some educators and researchers would argue that the habits and skills of artists can be cultivated with thoughtfully planned assignments, proponents of choice-based art education advocate for a purely student-driven studio environment in the art classroom. Jaquith (2011) and Douglas and Jaquith (2009) contended that "choice-based art education provides for the

development of artistic behaviors by enabling students to discover what it means to be an artist through the *authentic* creation of artwork" (Douglas & Jaquith, 2009, p. 3). This notion of authenticity is, once again, defined by the degree to which student art production emulates the habits and processes of professional artists. Choice-based art education, also known as Teaching for Artistic Behavior (TAB), is philosophical approach to art education, as opposed to a curriculum, that emphasizes the ability and disposition to: play with materials; dream and mentally plan; conceive and expand ideas for artmaking; abandon failed attempts; complete several pieces in a very short time or work for weeks on one piece; pursue multiple works at the same time; and accept mistakes as the springboard for new directions (2009, p. 3). These habits can be linked more broadly to abilities to define and solve problems, experiment, reflect on one's progress, and draw connections between ideas or processes. This approach is driven by a belief that if students are in control of their use of time and the direction of their creative energy, they will develop the skills of self-monitoring and managing their own skills, as well as engagement or investment in their work (Jaquith & Hathaway, 2012). To relate this work to idea-generation, the choice-based approach is a model of an emergent approach to arts learning: it prioritizes and cultivates students' abilities to generate their own creative ideas. In addressing creative ideation, however, Douglas and Jaquith gave relatively few concrete descriptions of classroom practice, explaining only that ideas may come from experimentation with art materials, that students may borrow ideas from one another as they work, and that students can keep a running list on a bulletin board, describing their thoughts on where professional artists' ideas come from; if they cannot think of an idea of their own, they can refer to this list for inspiration (2009, p. 43). Similarly, in an online informational post for Arts and Activities, Hathaway (2019) explained that her students generate ideas "through observing and relating personal experience, slideshows,

gallery experiences, videos, and sometimes serendipity."

Considering Personal Meaning

In these descriptions of contemporary practice in art education, there is a persistent emphasis on the value of intrinsic motivation in students' creative endeavors, and of the importance of creating space for students to make work of personal significance. Carroll (2006) and London (2006) described a "holistic paradigm" for art education in which students consider questions of deep personal relevance in creating their art, and teachers work to create a classroom atmosphere that encourages experimentation and risk-taking when carrying out this work. Such an approach, Carroll noted, facilitates for students an ownership of the entire creative process.

Most of the twenty-first century frameworks presented above emphasize the processes of developing ideas of personal relevance. This, of course, is a central theme of the APSA Concentration as well: the published course description describes the Concentration as "a body of works that demonstrate sustained and thoughtful investigation of a specific visual idea" (College Board, 2018).

This emphasis on conceptual development invites the question of what an acceptable idea is, on whose terms this is defined, and how, specifically, students learn to get ideas or to judge the quality or complexity of their conceptual concerns. Among some educators, it is believed that the content of creative work should relate primarily to the processes and skills of artmaking itself, while others hold that content may originate with the lived experience of the student (Burton, 2000). The following discussion of studies of teaching and learning in the visual arts will enable a clearer view into how the pursuit of meaning is constructed in contemporary art

classrooms, and to understand the distinctions between the purpose of artmaking as articulated by teachers and by students.

Studies of Teaching and Learning in the Visual Arts

As evidenced in the literature referenced here, the common state of *not-knowing* described by artists and theorists as a defining characteristic of intentionality may find an uncomfortable home in art classrooms. The already-complex notion of intention becomes more complicated in structured educational settings: while negotiating the balancing acts of one's own intentionality as an artist—devising a way of working that rests between plan and intuition, and between formal and expressive or conceptual concerns—there is also, in the classroom, an added push-and-pull between teacher intention and student intention. Hafeli (2009, 2012) noted the importance of honoring students' own ideas and goals for their own work and described the conscious effort teachers must make to not allow their notions of what constitutes a quality or worthwhile work overshadow students' own priorities. She described a process of "stepping in and stepping back" to describe the manner in which teachers might observe students in the process of creating and intervene only when needed, and noted the importance of students' ability to assert their own intentions for their work:

> [I]n analyzing and interpreting different layers of data, I found a particular form of resistance that was necessary for students to maintain if they were to develop independent judgment as artists, in the context of set assignment guidelines or criteria given by their teachers. Resistance is an oppositional quality, and I found that students who exhibited this kind of independent thinking defined their own artistic desires and intentions, and relied on a sense of autonomy, in finding and solving problems and making aesthetic decisions in their studio works. (p. 371)

Gude (2009) echoed this sentiment, describing an "artistically engaged individual" as one who "couples intense awareness with a strong sense of agency," noting the "dual awareness" of personal interests and preoccupations in relation to external prompts (p. 7). Tavin (2014)

described this awareness as well, observing the disparity between the priorities educators— "the things we think [students] should see" and the responses and ideas that they put forth in the classroom; he presents this as evidence of "something else going on—between them, us, and the world" (p. 439). In other words, intentionality is not one-directional; the role of the educator is not to set all of the parameters within which a student works. It is a constant negotiation between teacher and student, and between student and self.

While students have increasing opportunities to engage in process-oriented practice that is grounded in connections to the work of contemporary artists and designers, they are not always able to articulate the range of skills they are cultivating as the skills of an artist. Although arts education literature may adequately describe frameworks for instruction—what is taught, or what is intended to be taught—it may fall short of documenting what is actually learned or internalized by students. This is particularly relevant to a conversation about how artistic work is conceptualized: how ideas are generated, weighed for merit, and pursued.

Sapp (1997) examined problem finding as it related to art instruction, proposing models of problem identification and image development that link the processes of artmaking to studies on creativity more generally. In the classroom context, he assumed that some parameters will always be set by the educator. The author noted potential problems inherent in the design of these parameters: they may be incomplete, overly or inadequately restrictive, or they may expand and contract as the educator changes the guidelines or requirements of an assignment. In response to these problems, Sapp noted that students may negotiate the process of problem-finding by disregarding the parameters altogether, developing self-imposed parameters, or stretching the parameters. He wrote that "perhaps the most ideal relationship between the parameters presented by the teacher and students' responses to the parameters is a combination

of incomplete parameters [on the part of the teacher] and stretched parameters [on the part of the student]" (p. 288). It is worth noting that this combination yields a more open-ended studio situation wherein students are self-motivated enough to redefine the problem for themselves.

Salazar (2013) interviewed art school freshmen about their experiences in foundation-level studio courses. When students described what "skills" they had learned in these courses, they spoke solely in terms of technical skills. Conversely, when their professors were interviewed, she noted that "faculty suggested the artistic process of creating meaning is mysterious, while at the same time recognizing its importance," and that "though professors attempted to facilitate meaningful work... student survey responses suggested that students understood art as primarily illustrating concepts rather than generating experiences and knowledge" (p. 253). The author identified a number of "dilemmas" associated with the structure and pedagogy of the foundation year; for example, professors noted differences between their own studio processes and the ways that students were required to work in fulfilling their foundation requirements. In other words, the curriculum was perceived as being somewhat detrimental to students' learning to think and work like artists.

Perhaps the issue is that aspects of artistic process simply cannot be taught in any direct way. Elkins (2001) asserted this to be true in the case of contemporary art schools. He reasoned that some components of art production, including an understanding of criticism and theory, knowledge of the contemporary art world, technical expertise, and an understanding of elements and principles, can be taught, but that fluency in these areas alone cannot make someone an artist:

> I am not denying that art classes can teach these four things, nor am I saying that they aren't reasonable goals. But their marginal positions reveal how deeply we must believe that we are doing something else, whether or not we can say what it is. That other goal is nebulous, and it has to remain that way: otherwise teachers and students would be

> impelled to think about the contradictions between their claim that we can't teach art, and the reality that we behave as if we might be trying to do just that. (pp. 103-104)

Elkins contended that this is a requirement for art educators: that teaching is about having an intent to impart specific information to students. He contended that art, in the sense of being and working as an artist, cannot be taught, but that related subjects, like technique, theory, commerce, and "visual acuity" can be (p. 103). In his argument, Elkins himself seems to have been referencing the mystery of not-knowing and arguing that one cannot be taught how to navigate that space.

Although it seems that Elkins would have advised against it, Patricia James (2000) examined her own practice as an educator in an effort to better facilitate meaning-making as part of the creative process. She observed that an open-ended collage assignment "resulted in collages that seemed closed and predictable" (p. 153), and this predictability was taken as evidence that the work lacked personal relevance to her students. In response, she experimented with altering her practice in order to better enable the consideration of meaning as a central component of artmaking. In reflecting on this work, she noted that meaning can be cultivated through: flexible but focused constraints; personal, social, and artistic relevance; practice with metaphoric concepts; expectations of complexity, ambiguity, and depth of meaning; and expressive and reflective writing (p. 160).

Considering issues of meaning invites an obvious question: *To whom* is a work of art meant to be meaningful? Defining the purpose and meaning of art experiences is more than a debate between the educators, or between educator and prevailing philosophy in the field. At the classroom level, the goals of creative production are negotiated between teacher and student. Hafeli (2009) referred to the process of facilitating student artmaking as one of "reading" students and deciphering when and how to intervene in their processes, suggesting a desire for

creative production to be a primarily student-driven process. Of course, it does not always work out this way: in a case study of "Sally," a high school art student, Sharon Johnson (2009) observed that Sally was dissatisfied with her experiences in art class because the assignments given by her teacher did not allow for incorporation of content and ideas that interested or motivated her. Her teacher, on the other hand, expressed that the quality of Sally's work was compromised when she explored content and artistic processes of personal interest. Ideas of quality and content are naturally bound up in questions of the *intent* of the artist. At its core, describing an assignment or work of art as "teacher-driven" or "student-driven" is a kind of shorthand for identifying whose artistic intent is being fulfilled in the creation of that work. Describing "Georgia," an art educator who has made the reflective "stepping back" a part of her practice as an educator, Hafeli noted, "Georgia does not want to influence students' meanings for their works. Therefore, finding out about intentions and meanings...is sometimes and uncertain and tricky process" (2009, p. 64).

Adolescent Artmaking and the Pursuit of Meaning

It has been established above that professional artists create their work under widely varying circumstances and constraints, with different interests and goals in mind; this realization reveals the goals of art educators to have students "think like artists" to be a problematic one. If defining the habits and practices of artists is a complicated task, the prospect of imposing these processes onto the artmaking activities of adolescents presents new questions. Even if there were a collective understanding of what it means for students to think and work as artists, is that an appropriate goal for them? Do the abilities and interests of adolescent artists relate to those of

professionals? Should they? A review of research on adolescent artistic development may aid in defining where such comparisons could be problematic.

Adolescent Agency in Artmaking

The literature on idea development and artistic intention describes processes of highly personal choice-making on the part of the artist. In examining contemporary classrooms, however, Burton (2000, citing Greene, 1999) notes that such choice-making opportunities may be unfortunately rare, arguing that

> young people are too often bored in schools because we do not offer them meaningful challenges, we do not invite them to bring their own experiences into the arena of learning, we do not ask of them the kind of reflection and exploration of possibilities that engages their thinking, and we do not offer them insights and skills in those non-verbal languages of the arts where imagination can open up new corners of reality. (p. 330)

Csikszentmihalyi and Larson (1984) undertook a study of 75 suburban high school students in an effort to create an accurate picture of the experience of the adolescent. The study employed the Experience Sampling Method, wherein students were prompted several times a day to report on what they had just been doing, thinking, or feeling. The authors noted that, according to the respondents,

> The most intrinsically rewarding leisure activities turn out to be ones that are highly structured activities in which teenagers can use their skills within an organized framework. Art, hobbies, and sports allow students to pursue definite goals that are freely chosen. Art, music, and sports require going beyond the egocentric, impulsive activities of childhood; they demand discipline and engage adolescents in cultural systems, but unlike the activities imposed by school or job, they are undertaken willingly. (p. 95)

Opportunities to engage in fully self-directed artmaking may be rare in typical secondary art classrooms, but they would appear to align with the developmental needs and natural interests of adolescents in finding their own expressive voices. In considering exactly *how* adolescents go about making self-driven art, Kahn (2012) identified and investigated a large number of factors

that may influence choices of subjects and approaches to their work, and the creation of personal meaning. Among them are culture, peers, childhood interests, art cognition, domain specific role models, family, and religion. Similarly, Hafeli (2002) interviewed adolescent artists about the content and source material that influenced their work. The study offers a lens into the particular ways in which students construct personal meaning and identify creative source material that is personally relevant. These conversations revealed a great range of influences on the content of student artwork: students described their work in terms of formal aspects and of materials and techniques, but also described its narrative meaning. Student artworks depicted real events, imaginary events, ideas through the use of symbolism, or were created by direct observation of the subject. In addition, meaning was sometimes derived through the act of challenging oneself to do something difficult; having successfully completed the work made it personally significant.

Burton (2011) drew a distinction between the broad range of *sources* of influence on adolescent artistic expression, and the need for students to determine their own *methods or techniques* of expression. Both of these categories surely relate to the note above about "definite goals that are freely chosen." Burton argued that adolescents are up to this challenge and will willingly experiment with a range of methods and ideas in order to hit upon the ones that best match their interests. She noted that in adolescence, students begin to "develop a consciousness of design as style, both their own and that of others. They try out different styles, investigating their personal comfort levels, and the degree to which they create the most advantageous presentation of self" (2011, p. 47).

Popular Culture and Out-of-School Artmaking

Part of "trying out different styles" may involve styles borrowed from popular culture. Whereas Lowenfeld viewed the effects and influence of popular cultures as being detrimental to

students' artistic development, Burton (2011), in revisiting his work, argued that "in order to find new depth and balance in their thinking and a more refined repertoire through which ideas and responses can be constructed and expressed, youngsters spontaneously stretch out to popular cultural forms, such as doodling and cartooning" (2011, p. 5). Further, she noted that adolescents do not typically copy imagery from popular sources outright without altering it in some way: "appropriation is fragmentary," she noted, and student art often combines elements borrowed from multiple sources (p. 10). Burton calls such artwork "transformational images," and asserts that in borrowing and manipulating ideas from pop culture, students are expanding their personal repertoires and understandings of how materials and elements work, and that such artmaking guides students into the development of their own visual metaphors (p. 15). In altering and re-presenting imagery from popular culture, students are engaging in the authentic practice of artists: transforming meaning by transforming form itself (Hetrick, 2018).

Artwork that is heavily influenced by imagery from popular culture is often discouraged or outright forbidden in secondary art classrooms. In these cases, creating personally significant art may become a hobby that students engage in outside of school. Manifold (2009, 2012) conducted a survey of 101 adolescents and young adults who engaged in creating fan art—artwork inspired by comics, fantasy novels, and other contemporary pop culture—in order to find out how they learned to make their work, what motivated their interest, and to consider what art educators might learn from the young artists' ideas. While 79% of respondents reported that producing exact copies of favorite images enabled them to build and develop their skills as artists, she reported that "the ultimate goal of every fan-based art maker was to develop a distinct personal style that might set him or her apart from the original artist and from all other fans who create images or cosplay based on the same source" (p. 265), a sentiment that echoes Burton's

arguments. Manifold described a continuum of artistic practice in fan communities. At the earlier, or amateur, levels, artists engaged in direct copying of artwork—another practice often forbidden in high school classrooms—and expressed interest in extreme realism and technical virtuosity. The practice of copying enables artists to build these skills, and when they are comfortable with their level of technical facility, they often begin experimenting more in their creative choices. Manifold has coined a term—*framateur*—to describe accomplished fan artists, noting that work at this level is masterful in both technique and meaning: "The masterfully created work of fanart frames a metaphoric element of narrative content as a personalized interpretation of the source material with stylist characteristics that set it apart from the original" (2012, p. 46).

The young artists in Manifold's study drew sharp distinctions between their personal fan art and their artmaking experiences in school: while about one third reported that they learned techniques like perspective in art class that they could later put to use in their fan art, the remaining two-thirds reported their in-school art experiences to be entirely unhelpful; 26% did not even study art in school beyond the courses that were required. Of school art experiences, she noted that:

> The primary complaint (57%) centered on the structure of the art curriculum and instruction. Fanartists and cosplayers were patient in copying source materials as a process of learning how to communicate with others of the fan community, but were impatient about learning knowledge and skills that focused on technique without considering meaningfulness of content. They viewed instructor-directed, sequentially presented knowledge as out-of-sync with their needs to explore some artistic processes repeatedly while acquiring other skills on a 'need to know' basis as they attempted to express ideas about their interests. (p. 266)

The Advanced Placement Studio Art Portfolio

The AP Studio Art program provides the context for this dissertation study; the study does not examine adolescent self-directed artmaking in general, but rather within the specific context of the Sustained Investigation. Such a structure implies that the AP portfolio is an appropriate organizer for this work, and that it provides space for adolescent pursuit of meaning and ideas of personal significance. Is the portfolio truly constructed to allow for the flexibility and ambiguity of the process-event of art-making? In order to establish the Sustained Investigation as a proper frame for this inquiry, it is worth examining the history and purposes of the AP Studio Art program, especially as they relate to the Sustained Investigation.

History of Advanced Placement Studio Art

In the mid-twentieth century, the threat of Communism and fears that American students were not being adequately trained to academically outperform their Soviet counterparts prompted a renewed investment in education, particularly in the sciences, and to a lesser extent in foreign languages. In the early 1950s, John Kemper, headmaster at Phillips Academy, one of the nation's most elite boarding schools, contacted the head of the newly-established Fund for the Advancement of Education (FAE), to express concern that students at his and other similar schools were bored in their first years of college, even at equally-elite institutions including Harvard, Yale, and Princeton. He reported that they found the material covered in these universities to be redundant with what they had already experienced in high school. That the nation's presumed "best and brightest" young minds might become disinterested in their educational and professional pursuits represented a perceived threat to the ability of American workers to remain internationally competitive (Rothschild, 1999). A committee was formed to

further explore this topic; among the resulting recommendations was the establishment of an advanced placement course of study for high school students. During the same time period, Gordon Keith Chalmers, president of Kenyon College, sought to create models of courses that colleges would grant credit for, even if these courses were completed by high school students. This became the Advanced Placement model, and by the mid-1950s, AP courses and exams were being developed and piloted in 27 schools.[3]

At the program's founding, AP courses were offered in ten disciplines, which did not include the arts, and art educators of the era felt the tightening of the curriculum. A few years after the inauguration of the AP program, in the 1965 *Report of the Commission on Art Education*, Edwin Ziegfeld declared that the future of the field was uncertain:

> In the fierce competition of the cold war, science, mathematics, and foreign languages have been linked to our international position – indeed to our survival. There is no denying their importance, but this in no way limits or lessens the importance of the arts. (p. 8)

Ziegfeld asserted that the way to deal with this challenge was to approach arts instruction with equal rigor. "Much teaching is inefficient and mediocre," he admitted, echoing the concerns in other subject areas that led to the creation of the AP program in the first place (p. 9).

In 1966, the Colorado College Conference on Advanced Placement in Art was held, with the stated purpose of "discuss[ing] the possibility of applying the concept of Advanced Placement to the field of art" (Arnest and Trissel, 1966, p. 1). Presenters included Howard

[3] Although the AP program was initially developed with elite and high-achieving students in mind, the program's content and mission evolved considerably in the subsequent decades. Particularly from the 1970s onward, as AP expanded so did its mission to increase college access and readiness among students of all backgrounds. In partnership with state and federal programs and nonprofit initiatives, AP has become a tool for encouraging and enabling traditionally underserved students to engage with college-level coursework and strengthen their preparation for eventual college participation. More than 60 years after the program's elite beginnings, 89 percent of students who took AP exams in 2017 were from public schools. In spite of these attempts to equalize opportunity as the program grew, it must also be pointed out that current access is still not equal. High schools in better-resourced urban and suburban districts are still more likely to have AP programs at all, and those programs are more likely to include a wider range of courses than their poorer and rural counterparts (Finn & Scanlan, 2019).

Conant of New York University, Elliot Eisner, who was at the time at Stanford University, and Kenneth Beittel of Penn State University. Much of the conference was devoted to determining what constitutes "college level" work in the arts and considering how the concept of excellence applied to contemporary study in the arts. Participants' remarks reflect the emergence in the era of research and thinking on assessment methods in the visual arts, but they also highlight growing interest in aesthetic education – including the processes of responding to works of art as activities of equal importance to creative production.

Notably, the Seminar in Art Education for Research and Curriculum Development (more commonly referred to as the Penn State Seminar) had convened just a year prior to the Colorado College conference, and the two convenings shared a number of participants. The Penn State Seminar was a landmark convening, marking the convergence of thought on curriculum design, understanding of developmental theory in the arts, the study of art history and aesthetics, and the relation of these studies to artmaking. While the Colorado conference was a smaller-scale undertaking, it likely reaped the benefits of the conversations that had been begun the year prior and allowed a forum for conversation to continue.

The Colorado conference culminated in a recommendation for the establishment of a committee to pursue the development of an Advanced Placement course of study in art. This committee included Walter Askin, Charles Dorn, Eugene Grigsby, Al Hurwitz, H. W. Janson, and Allan Kaprow. The makeup of the committee reflects a range of expertise and viewpoints; their writings of the era imply that many were certainly progressive in their philosophies and approaches to art education. Grigsby was a professor in the School of Architecture and Urban Planning at UCLA, who incorporated community advocacy and engagement in the design

process. At the Penn State Seminar, Kaprow had expressed fears about prescriptive approaches to art education, noting that:

> Systemization, so far, has invariably killed magic, and has broadcast false or dull values and senseless activities... The problem of art education may be an eternal dilemma, in the sense that we cannot have a packaged, full-strength mystery for thousands of teachers in charge of millions of children. But must we think in terms of neat packages? If we are going to fail for the most part, can we not fail more interestingly, that is with a little color? We might even succeed a little here and there. (Mattil, 1966, p. 94)

These voices were among those to define the development to the Advanced Placement course in Studio Art, which was offered for the first time in the 1971-72 academic year. While educators of the era must have felt the pressure to legitimize art experiences as "academic," statements like these provide evidence that they were simultaneously dedicated to providing authentic art experiences for students.

The APSA Concentration

From the outset, the AP Studio Art portfolio requirements included the development of a component termed a "concentration." The Concentration section was conceived as a body of work that was to be primarily student-driven, as opposed to assignment-driven. "A project reflecting concentration," the 1974 description noted, "should involve your commitment to and your intense exploration of a specific idea," or, a "personal preoccupation with a particular mode of working, thinking, and stating." Further, the description of the Concentration explicitly allowed for the possibility of failure in this endeavor, explaining that "it is anticipated that your project may involve frustrations and disappointments and that its execution will reflect your self-discipline and desire to persevere" (College Entrance Examination Board, 1974, 1975, 1976).

The Concentration section was the only one to include student written commentary as well, and the format for this evolved in the early years of the program. In earlier years it was optional, but eventually it became mandatory, and prompts were offered to guide students'

writing, asking for descriptions of the work, its influences, and the process of its planning and creation.

Development committee member Al Hurwitz wrote an extensive article for *School Arts* in 1980 praising the concentration, especially as it might prove valuable to students contemplating an art-focused path for college or career:

> One of the problems faced by art teachers is how to help students sustain attention over a long period of time on a given visual experience. This type of concentration is useful for students in any subject. In art, it requires that students dig well below the surface of a problem and avoid the short-term solution. The *Art is fun* attitude is simply an inadequate view of art for the student who is thinking about applying aptitude to professional training. It is hoped that the student will learn the difference between *fun* and some deeper level of satisfaction. (p. 6)

Hurwitz appeared to be particularly proud of the written commentary as a tool for student reflection; he suggested that "students, perhaps for the first time in their school career, are asked to talk about what they think and feel, how frustrations were handled, and how they dealt with failure and success" (p. 6).

Sustained Investigation: Contemporary Requirements

Over several decades of shifts in the language of AP portfolio requirements, there has remained a consistent interest in process. For periods of time, the requirements even explicitly allowed for unsuccessful or unresolved work to be submitted as a component of the Concentration. Further, students have been consistently encouraged to articulate their aims and influences as a part of sharing their work. In 2018, the title of the Concentration had shifted to the Sustained Investigation, but the requirements bear a striking resemblance to those of earlier decades. The scoring guidelines for the 2018-19 school year reflect a balance of formal and conceptual concerns, noting that a successful Concentration reflected a coherently-presented exploration of a topic, evidence of discovery and risk-taking, an understanding of elements and

principles, mastery of media and techniques, and a sense of transformation and growth over time (College Board, 2018).

In the push-and-pull of trends in curriculum design and teaching practices in art over the decades since the Concentration was developed, the requirements for the APSA portfolio have remained relatively consistent. The flexibility of the model may be the key to its longevity and continued relevance. The Sustained Investigation imposes a relatively minimal structure and maintains a balanced focus on the development of both form and meaning, allowing teachers and students to apply a variety of structures and entry points to the development and navigation of this work (Blaikie, 1994; Graham, 2009). The particular structures and requirements of the AP portfolio continue to resonate with teachers and students: in 2018, over 66,000 portfolios were submitted for evaluation (Jeanes, 2018).

Chapter Summary

This literature review has described a range of influences—pedagogical, philosophical, artistic, and developmental—that may inform idea generation and -development in student creative work, and that may influence the ways that that work is facilitated in a classroom setting. These influences reflect the practices and philosophies of a range of stakeholders: arts researchers, teachers, students, assessment specialists, and contemporary artists themselves, as educators often strive to relate classroom practice directly to artistic practice.

The research and sources presented here raise questions about the relationship between the personally-held *meaning* inherent in creative work, the development of an *intention* or plan for how to structure that work, and the *concepts* that bind that work; the review suggests that in

the classroom context, these ideas may be thought of interchangeably, or may not be discussed at all.

The literature presented here has additionally raised questions about the ways that authentic creative practice might best be facilitated, especially as it relates to the creation of student-driven work. In the *event* of artmaking, the teacher role may enable or interfere with the process. Navigating the Concentration process requires educators to maintain a delicate balance of "stepping in and stepping back," determining when intervention in student work is warranted or invited (Hafeli, 2012).

This discussion of artistic practice has also acknowledged the range of audiences relevant to the APSA Sustained Investigation. It could be argued that the greatest challenge presented in the APSA Concentration is that it is deceptively "self-directed": students must define the parameters of their own work, but they are doing this while considering or inferring teacher and reviewer expectations alongside their own.

This juxtaposition of perspectives highlights the issue of *intent* in artmaking once again, and draws attention to areas of potential miscommunication, or even non-communication, among teachers and students as purpose, motivation, and criteria for success for student artwork are defined and negotiated in contemporary art classrooms.

These questions of artistic practice, pedagogy, intent, meaning, and audience have laid the groundwork for the examination of teacher, student, and reader perspectives on the relevance of the AP Sustained Investigation as it relates to the pursuit of meaning, and will offer a range of lenses through which to interpret their thoughts.

Chapter III

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to identify qualities or criteria that APSA teachers, students, and readers associate with a worthwhile idea as it relates to the Sustained Investigation section of the portfolio. The term *idea* is used broadly here, to stand for the range of ways that respondents might conceptualize artistic intent in the context of the Sustained Investigation. An idea, therefore, might refer to a subject, artistic material or process, or concept, for example. The study aimed not only to document the various ways that teachers, students, and readers might define an idea, but to note the ways that participants assigned value to one idea or type of idea over another, and the sources of influence on these decisions. Further, the study explored their descriptions of what it means to effectively investigate that idea over the course of the creation of a body of work.

These three participant types—teachers, students, and readers—constituted the primary sources of data, as they all play instrumental roles in the shaping of the Sustained Investigation: readers contribute to the setting of standards and expectations that are interpreted by teachers and their students; teachers are often students' first and most trusted source of information on what the purpose of the Sustained Investigation section is, and what constitutes quality in terms of student work; and the students themselves are the artists around whom the teachers' and administrators' ideas and activity is focused. Students' creative processes may be informed by

their understanding of teacher- and program-level expectations, as well as their own interests and priorities as artists.

Very similar information was needed from the three groups of respondents, as part of the purpose of the research was to compare themes in responses across different participant groups—for example, noting whether the qualities of teachers' definitions of an idea consistently and substantially differed from the ways that students or portfolio readers discussed ideas in artmaking. With that in mind, this study relied on participants' ability to articulate:

- What teachers, students, and portfolio readers understand the purpose of the Sustained Investigation to be; what qualities define a particularly masterful approach to the Sustained Investigation, particularly as those qualities relate to the identification of a compelling idea for investigation.
- How students prioritize and select potential ideas and approaches to their Sustained Investigation work; how teachers guide students through the process of conceptualizing and creating their work – both on a general level and in the specific cases of working with particular students participating in the study.
- How teachers interpret the ideas, priorities and values of their students in the context of the Sustained Investigation development; how students interpret the same from their teachers.
- The ways that all participants define, directly and indirectly, the notion of a unifying idea or concept in the context of the Sustained Investigation, and how they articulate their personal definitions of what it means to investigate or pursue that idea over a series of several works.

- The sources of greatest influence on all participants' personal philosophies and priorities related to generating independent work.

Pilot Research: The Development of this Study Over Time

A number of smaller preliminary studies that I undertook contributed to the development of this research, clarifying the question at the heart of this dissertation study as well as its approach to data collection and analysis.

APSA student interviews. In a research component of a course on adolescent artistic development in the spring of 2014, I interviewed three APSA students about their experiences developing the Concentration portion of their portfolios. In my experience at the College Board, I had become aware anecdotally that the Concentration was widely regarded by teachers and students to be the most challenging portion of the portfolio, and I wanted to identify themes and commonalities in the ways that students approached these challenges, specifically in terms of idea generation, experimentation with media and ideas, and the preparation of a sustained body of work. I wanted to hear from them precisely what the challenges were within each of these components of portfolio development. Conversations with these three students revealed that they struggled to choose an interesting and cohesive topic, to follow that topic through the creation of multiple works, and to pace themselves in order to complete their work on time and as envisioned. They also spoke of the important role of the teacher in influencing their choice of ideas to pursue and how to manageably carry out the process of completing the portfolio. I became curious about the possible tension in the teacher role here, specifically in the balance between guiding students in the creation of their own work without over-imposing one's own ideas and preferences.

Pilot study: APSA teachers, students, and readers. Following this interest in hearing about the challenges inherent in the Concentration process from multiple perspectives, I conducted a pilot study (Charleroy, 2015) interviewing APSA teachers, students, and portfolio reviewers—nine participants in total. This work was undertaken with the goal of better understanding their criteria for quality or success in the undertaking the concentration, and to compare teacher and student descriptions of the considerations in navigating this process. Broadly, I was looking at what the Concentration was perceived to be *about*, from this range of perspectives. Themes that emerged in my conversations with all three participant types reflected the Concentration as an evolution of self, an evolution of work, a reflection of personally relevant work, and a challenging volume of work. Some of the more interesting findings revealed the gaps in perception and communication between different program constituents: only the adults who were interviewed—teachers and readers—referred to the Concentration as an "investigation" (bearing in mind that this was prior to the title shift from *Concentration* to *Sustained Investigation*), while students described the process in more concrete terms, and never as a process of inquiry. In general, while teachers stressed the importance of students' working with personally relevant ideas, several also described a process of vetting student ideas before they began working, dismissing ones that seemed too general or trite. Students, too, were concerned with the conceptual strength of their work, especially as it appeared to outside judges: one student described creating a series of drawings because she simply enjoyed the process and the imagery, and then she "made something up" to describe the work's theme and content in her written Concentration statement, in order to meet the perceived expectations of conceptual rigor. "I should have been more honest," she said, "about how I just liked drawing" (Charleroy, 2015, pp. 17-18). I found this example to be especially resonant—and concerning—because the

student's practice so clearly reflects the artists' habits described in the literature, and yet in her own classroom, this student feared her work would be perceived as less rigorous because she could not clearly articulate what it was about.

Throughout this study, I found that while all participants had personally held views about what constitutes a good or worthwhile idea, these were often implied rather than overtly stated, and they were often perceived to be at odds with the implied views of the other program constituents. Through this work, I became more interested specifically in the concept of a good or idea in the context of the AP concentration, but also in linking the study of ideas to the study of these often-unspoken assumptions and inferred communications.

Analysis of written Concentration statements. In the spring of 2017, I analyzed a sampling of 250 written student Concentration statements, collected by the College Board from 2009-2015. These short statements are a required component of portfolio submission. The statement at that point in time was guided by two questions: one inviting students to describe the idea that was central to their concentration, and one describing their process of investigating that idea. Whereas interviews had offered an in-depth understanding of a few students' experiences with the concentration, analyzing these statements allowed a way to understand themes and trends in student approaches to ideation and investigation on a much broader scale.

In analyzing the statements, I identified themes that emerged in responses to each of the two prompts. I found that student conceptions of ideas could broadly be grouped into three categories: *emotional or psychological ideas* (explorations of feelings/emotions and human relationships) *concepts as ideas* (observable subject matter used symbolically, a broad theme or concept, or a self-developed theme or title), and *subject matter as idea* (portraits/figures, self, place, and other observable subject matter). When asked how their work reflects an investigation

of their stated ideas, the most prevalent approaches were: to describe *material or technical choices* made in the work, to highlight the use of *elements of art and principles of design*, to describe a *process of evolution and change*, to describe the *symbolic content* of the work, and to a lesser extent, to write more extensively about the *significance of the selected topic or theme*.

The generality of these statements, as compared to the specificity and vibrancy with which students spoke about their work and process, seemed to have been written in anticipation of what a reader might like to hear. References to elements of art and principles of design were abundant, for example, whereas students that I had interviewed had almost never spoken about their significance. It made me mindful that thinking about one's work while creating it, talking about that work, and writing about it are all different processes, each associated with different audiences—self, teacher (or in this case, researcher), and evaluator. I decided in the dissertation study not to analyze student writing on its own, but to include a discussion of the writing as part of the interview process, as I was very curious about how students thought about that writing, and its relationship to their work, process, and feelings about evaluation.

Design of the Study

Type of Study and Rationale

This study was qualitative in nature, as it aimed to offer a holistic account of the problem being investigated (Creswell, 2013). It was guided by the understanding that reality is built in the interaction between individuals and their social worlds; with this in mind, a goal of the research was to document participant experiences and interactions in their own terms (Merriam, 1998, p. 6). This study was meant to describe the meaning that participants assigned to the process (Creswell, 2013), not to cobble together a "true" meaning of what constitutes a worthwhile idea

or investigation, or to evaluate responses against any standard of artistic or conceptual merit. The richness and usefulness of the data lies in the breadth of responses and perspectives represented, documenting the inherent complexity in the process of developing a Sustained Investigation.

Case study methodology. This research has been undertaken as a case study. This design lends itself especially well to investigations of process (Merriam, 1998), and of answering questions of *how* and *why* that might surround certain events or experiences (Yin, 2014). The research questions and sub-questions that formed the basis of this study were best served by a case study design because this work has necessarily been an inherently process-oriented investigation, examining the way student ideas are generated and how they evolve over time. Case study research allows for rich and multifaceted descriptions of the phenomenon under study (Merriam, 1998), as the situation under study involved several variables of interest (Yin, 2014). In order to adequately address the issue under investigation—the interplay of teacher, student, and reader priorities and assumptions about the conceptual development of the APSA Sustained Investigation—data have been collected from all three of these populations. Participants were drawn from across four school sites, as well as the AP pool of readers. The design of the research was meant to allow for the examination of participants' points of view on an individual level, but also to consider how the varying perspectives informed, overlapped with, or even contradicted one another. As a case study, it was meant to provide a description that highlights the complexity of the phenomenon being studied (Merriam, p. 29), rather than oversimplifying the issues under consideration.

This research can more specifically be considered a collective case study (also referred to as a multiple case study), as it represents a broad case, or bounded system (Merriam, 1998)—the APSA program—while investigating a series of smaller sub-cases that contribute to this larger

whole (Creswell, 2013). The four individual school sites from which participants were drawn, for example, could be considered their own sub-cases; similarly, subgroups of participant types—teachers, students, and readers—comprise cases of their own. The central concept of focus in this research—understanding the processes and philosophies that inform students' decisions on what creative ideas to pursue in the context of creating their APSA Sustained Investigation work—remained consistent across all settings. Organizing this research as a collective case study allowed for cross-case analysis, making it possible for findings across sites or across population groups to reinforce or challenge one another. In contrast, a study organized around a single school setting would run the risk of documenting only the effects of a particular school culture, and would not be able to offer a great deal of insight into the range of ways that open-ended artmaking is approached among teachers and students in a broader sense.

A study with multiple sites and multiple participant types could have also been constructed as a comparative study. Such a structure would have naturally resulted in a comparison of values and ideas across sites, implying that one approach may be more successful than another. The collective case study model allows the research to highlight the range of values and influences that come into play in navigating the APSA Sustained Investigation, without favoring one approach or set of ideals over another.

Aspects of this study are phenomenological in nature, as a thread of the inquiry aimed to describe participants' conceptions of the Sustained Investigation. The research, however, extended beyond the goal of description and definition to document the ways that these understandings may evolve over time, while also investigating the range of factors that contribute to individuals' definitions and approaches. The work, therefore, is best suited to the category of case study research.

Context of the Study

Site and teacher selection. In selecting the school sites and the AP teachers for this study, the primary intent was to enable maximum variation in the representation of sizes, types, and locations of schools offering AP Studio Art (Creswell, 2013; Seidman, 2013). In particular, in selecting school sites I prioritized diversity in terms of school type (also ensuring a degree of socioeconomic diversity), geographic diversity, and diversity of school size. The resulting collection of sites includes one northeastern suburban private school, one urban parochial school, one large suburban public school, and one mid-size suburban arts magnet school.

The selection of school sites also represented purposeful selection of teacher participants, prioritizing those with a degree of experience and familiarity with the AP Studio Art program. A selection for criteria of teachers was that they had been teaching the course for three or more years. The rationale for this choice was that in this span of time, many may likely have been able to develop a personal approach or philosophy toward guiding students through the Sustained Investigation, creating a greater likelihood that they would have a clear and considered rationale for their pedagogical and philosophical approaches to this work. Teachers new to AP, by contrast, may be more occupied with program logistics in their first year, and may have fewer opinions on the benefits of one particular approach to instruction over another. Similarly, all participating AP readers have had three or more years of experience in that role as well, for the same reason.

Site 1: Urban parochial. I was introduced to the teacher of this school, in a major Northeastern city, while conducting pilot research that contributed to the development of this study. The teacher answered my request on the online AP teacher community message boards, soliciting student participation in a small interview-based study. Since that interaction, this

teacher went on to become an AP reader, and continues to teach the course five years later. Her school is Roman Catholic and serves an all-female student body of about 350, in grades 9-12. The student population is 78% Hispanic, 18% Black, 3% White. It is a point of pride for the school community that 100% of its graduates attend college. The teacher is White and had been teaching the AP course for six years, though she had been in the classroom for a few years longer.

Site 2: Suburban public (charter). I made contact with the AP teacher at this suburban school in the southeast United States when I was referred to her through an AP program colleague. This public charter school opened in 2012, and the APSA teacher reported that the student body has grown every year since. She noted that when the school opened in 2012 she had two AP students, and there was a graduating class of 110 seniors; now she has 38 AP students, with a total student body of 2200. The school represents a relatively wealthy district, with only 5% of students eligible for free or reduced-price lunch. The student body is 70% White, 10% Black, 10% Asian, and 8% Hispanic. The teacher is White and, as mentioned, has been teaching the AP course since the school opened.

Site 3: Suburban arts magnet. In recruiting participants for this study, I made a request to the online community of AP readers (structured as a closed Facebook group) specifically for a representative from an arts magnet high school. The teacher/reader who responded and participated (along with his students) is a White male who had taught AP for nine years, but the 2018-19 school year marked his first year at this school. The suburban school in the Mountain region of the United States serves students in grades 6-12, and has a relatively small student population, with fewer than 200 students per class. The makeup of the school is 70% White, 4% Black, 15% Hispanic, and 4% Asian.

Site 4: Suburban private. The AP program keeps a publicly-available course ledger—an online document listing all schools that offer particular AP courses. I contacted the teacher from this northeastern suburban private school through the information provided in the ledger and invited her to participate in this research. The teacher, a woman who described herself as an American of Middle Eastern descent, has been teaching APSA for 10 years, 9.5 of which have been spent at this school. The school maintains an enrollment of about 500 students in grades 9-12, about 40% of whom board there, while the remaining 60% live locally. The student makeup reflects 36% are students of color and 17% are international students.

Selection of student participants. In selecting student participants, I collaborated with the four participating teachers on a purposeful sampling method that prioritized the selection of typical cases from each of their classrooms (Creswell, 2013). I asked each teacher to refer three students according to two key criteria: first, students should be willing and able to talk about their work at length. Secondly, I requested that teachers not necessarily recommend their highest-performing students. These criteria were purposefully minimal in order to ensure that enough students could be recruited. This method, however, did produce somewhat skewed results in terms of student demographics: for example, of the 12 student participants, 11 were female, and almost 75% were White.

Selection of reader participants. I used a purposeful sampling method in the recruitment of four readers to participate in this study. In general, readers may be APSA teachers, or they may serve as faculty in college foundation-level studio art programs. As two of the participating high school teachers in this study had also served as readers, in searching for additional readers I prioritized finding representatives from colleges and universities. Additionally, I selected readers that I had met previously, but with whom I had not worked

closely or extensively during my time at the College Board. Of the four participants, three were college faculty, representing both public and private institutions, including one large art school. The final participating reader was a high school AP teacher in a suburban district on the east coast. Two of the selected readers were women and two were men. The AP reader pool in general is geographically diverse, but not particularly ethnically diverse, and this sampling reflected that: all four of the participating readers were White. Two participants had at one point served as Chief Reader—the individual responsible for overseeing the reading process each year, including managing the training of new and returning readers.

In total, then, this study involved 20 participants: four teachers (two of whom were also readers), 12 students, and four additional readers.

Data Collection

Interviews as Primary Data Source

Interviews with teachers, students, and readers provided the primary source of data in this study. The research was meant to document processes and points of view that may be difficult to articulate: participants were asked to describe their thoughts on the Sustained Investigation purpose and process, and in doing so, speak about how meaning is generated and assigned to ideas or processes. They were asked to describe their experiences related to the Sustained Investigation, but also the meaning of those experiences (Seidman, 2013). It can take a while to arrive at these thoughts, and to describe how they might have shifted over time as well. To that end, the opportunity for focused and in-depth conversations that an interview affords (Brinkman

& Kvale, 2015) allows for the collecting and exploration of truly rich data that has the potential to generate multiple themes for later exploration and analysis (Rubin & Rubin, 2012).

All interviews were semi-structured, meaning that the conversation was guided by a prepared list of questions, but it was assumed that aspects of teacher, student, and reader commentary would warrant further probing on the part of the interviewer, and the interview structure was flexible enough to allow for such digressions (Berg & Lune, 2012). Particular areas or topics that invited these digressions were not fully consistent across populations interviewed.

Retrospective post-then-pre design. Each respondent was interviewed one time, within about two months after the 2019 APSA portfolios were submitted and reviewed. Although interview protocols, especially for conversations with students, were designed to capture information about the entire process of creating the Sustained Investigation, I opted not to conduct multiple interviews throughout this process. I recognized that this research was most concerned with the sense that participants made of the experience after its completion; they would be more likely to be able to articulate something of the arc of their learning or thinking about their work over time after that work was completed rather than when they were in the middle of it. This approach is a retrospective post-then-pre design, meaning that it relies on participants' self-reporting of changes in their knowledge or abilities over time. This design is a means to control for response shift bias (Howard, 1980). In other words, if respondents were evaluating their ideas or progress on the Sustained Investigation at different points throughout the year, at each point (as a result of their engagement in the process) they would have different information or skills that would allow them to self-evaluate in different terms. It is more valuable to this research to have students self-evaluate their progress retrospectively at the close of the process, and in that reflection to build the narrative of the development of their Sustained

Investigations. Their thoughts on the beginning of the Sustained Investigation process were likely richer after the portfolio was completed, as it allowed them to place that early knowledge and ideas in the context of their full progress on the body of work.

All interviews were conducted on Skype or FaceTime and were about 90 minutes in length. They were timed to take place after students had completed and submitted their portfolios for evaluation; in some cases, students had already received their scores as well. Interviews were audio recorded and transcribed for later analysis. Interviewees were sent copies of their transcripts, to review for accuracy.

It is notable, and deliberate, that student artwork itself was not analyzed as a part of this study. This research was not intended to measure the extent to which student intent, as articulated in interviews, focus groups, and written statements, is evident in the finished work. The focus of this inquiry was on the priorities, philosophies, and understandings that guide the act of artmaking, not the relative success of the execution of the work. Several students did, however, want to share their work with me during the interview process as an aid to our conversation, either holding up the work itself during our video chats or emailing me links to online images for reference.

Interview Protocol Design

Student interviews. Students were asked to recount their experiences in developing their own Sustained Investigations over the course of the school year. Woven into these conversations were discussions of the meaning of those experience, including which aspects were particularly important to them, which were challenging or frustrating, and how they defined success in the Sustained Investigation. Significant time was spent on discerning how students arrived at the ideas that were central to their work, and how they knew when they had hit upon an area of

inquiry that they would like to pursue in-depth. They were asked how their work and their ideas changed and evolved over time and were asked to reflect on their satisfaction with their final body of work. They were asked for their thoughts on the portfolio review process: In particular, did they think they would have approached their work differently if it were not being assessed by outside evaluators? Finally, all students were invited to give hypothetical advice to new AP students: What did they wish they had known at the outset about the process of developing a personally relevant body of work?

Teacher interviews. Central to the teacher interviews were questions about their individual conceptions of the Sustained Investigation, and processes or practices by which they facilitated this work's development in their classrooms. The conversations placed particular emphasis on their stated priorities for this work or what they wanted students to understand about what the Sustained Investigation should be. They were asked for examples of their practices for assisting students in idea generation and refinement; relatedly, they offered reflections on the evolution of ideas over the course of a body of work. Questions focused on what made an especially strong or weak Concentration especially as it relates to the conceptual and meaning-focused aspects, and probed for the kinds of advice and feedback they gave to students and the kinds of structures, if any, that they establish for students to work within.

Teachers were also asked some questions about the work and processes of the particular students participating in this study. Such questions allowed for an analysis of the relationship between teacher and student perceptions of the development of the same body of work, and its relative successes and challenges.

Reader interviews. Readers were asked about the portfolio evaluation process, especially the scoring of Sustained Investigations. In particular, they discussed the hallmarks of

successful Sustained Investigations and shared examples of recent ones that they felt were particularly memorable, especially in terms of the central idea or inquiry at the heart of the work. They were asked for advice that they would give to teachers and students navigating the Sustained Investigation process, particularly about how to approach the process of inquiry or investigation of an idea.

Issues of Ethics and Validity

All participants received and signed release forms describing the purpose and goals of the study, and their role and activities as a participant. I reviewed these forms with all participants, and answered any questions or concerns related to their participation prior to the start of data collection. In cases where participating students were not yet 18, release forms were distributed to parents, and students received assent forms, which I additionally reviewed with them. All participants were assured that their participation was purely voluntary, and students were advised that they could choose not to participate at any time, even if their teacher strongly recommended their participation. Likewise, I advised against teachers' offering any sort of incentive (e.g., extra credit) to students for their participation.

Participants were assured that this was a minimal risk study. All participants were assured verbally and in writing that if they felt uncomfortable answering any questions about the portfolio development or evaluation process, they were not required to answer any questions or divulge anything they did not want to talk about. They were assured that they could stop participating in the study at any time without penalty. I recognized that my professional role was likely to present a perceived risk, especially to students: they were being asked by a College Board employee to describe, in depth, work that they developed for a College Board assessment. Although I do not play a role in the portfolio scoring process, in order to assuage any concerns,

student and teacher interviews were held in the summer, after portfolios had been submitted and evaluated. The timing of the data collection removed potential concerns that the information shared might affect students' portfolio scores. In the event that there were persistent concerns about students' willingness to speak candidly about their APSA Sustained Investigation work to a representative of the College Board, I was prepared to invite another researcher to conduct the student interviews, in an effort to maintain an equitable balance of power in the researcher-participant relationship (Seidman, 2013). Such concerns did not arise in the process of participant recruitment or data collection, however.

Participants were assured of the confidentiality of all conversations surrounding this work. Participant names were changed on all study materials, and images of student artwork were not collected, as these could potentially compromise their anonymity if shared or published in any capacity. No identifying information was shared with anyone outside of the school site at any point in the study. In addition, interview transcripts were submitted to interviewees for review and approval before the process of data analysis began.

Data Analysis

Data analysis in this study involved post-interview analytic memoing, as well as several rounds of coding that identified emergent themes in teacher, student, and reader commentary.

Analytic Memoing

The first step of analysis involved a thorough review of all interview transcripts in an effort to begin to detect themes in respondents' ideas, and to make note of potential codes to be used in data analysis. As stated above, the anticipated product of this study was a detailed,

multilayered description of the experiences and worldviews of the three sets of participants in their efforts to articulate their intentions for independent (or semi-independent) artmaking. With this goal in mind, it became imperative that analytic memoing (Creswell, 2013; Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014)—the researcher's ongoing process of reflecting on the data as it is analyzed – was employed as the first step in an ongoing method of organizing and responding to the case study throughout the process of analysis. Through memoing, I was able to collect and consider emergent questions and notes on potential patterns in the findings of the research, in an effort to examine and present the data as comprehensively as possible.

Coding Processes

The process of analysis was an inductive one: The categories of codes and themes emerged through repeated reading and analysis of participant commentary, and likewise, the patterns and contradictions in participant views and experiences were gradually detected through ongoing comparison in various forms. Coding was conducted using a constant comparative method identifying emergent themes and ideas in participant commentary. Emergent codes related directly to the research questions, addressing: participants' definitions of and personal priorities related to ideation and investigation; their descriptions of the qualities of exceptionally compelling artistic ideas; and the sources of influence on the development of these personal philosophies. Early phases of coding made use of a combination of elemental methods, including descriptive coding, wherein codes are developed to describe the basic ideas or subjects being expressed by participants, and in vivo coding, in which the language of codes are drawn directly from the language used by participants (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014, p. 73). Because of the nature of this inquiry, values coding, in which codes indicate values or beliefs being

expressed, or evaluation coding, for cases in which the date indicates a judgment being made by the participant (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana), was often employed in early stages as well.

After initial coding structures were developed and implemented, a subsequent phase of analysis involved pattern coding: condensing the larger number of codes recorded and summarized in the first phase of coding, and considering these codes in relation to one another in order to produce a smaller number of grouped ideas (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014).

Although teachers, students, and readers naturally experience the APSA Sustained Investigation process from different vantage points, the core research questions applied to each population equally. With that in mind, I applied the same emerging body of codes to the analysis of all participant responses. This is not meant to imply that all three participant types were especially united in their commentary. Rather, a uniform coding structure was applied with the intent of enabling a rich variety of within-case and cross-case analysis.

Within-case and cross-case analysis. As certain segments of the study's participants may be considered sub-cases to the larger case of the APSA program, it was useful to compare the bodies of data relating to these segments of the research, and analyze them on their own before considering this data in the context of the case study as a whole.

Although within-case data certainly informed the study as a whole, the heart of the process of data analysis in this research lies in cross-case comparisons, wherein the commentary of readers, teachers, and students across sites are compared to one another. It is here that the full range of values, preferences, philosophies, and ideas expressed by the study's participants can be most clearly detected, and where they may be understood in comparison and contrast with one another.

The intent of all analysis in this study was not to prioritize one set of values or ideas over another. That is, if reader commentary differed from that of teachers and students, it was not interpreted in the context of this research as an indication of the degree to which teachers or students have understood or properly interpreted AP expectations. Rather, the purpose of cross-case analysis was to allow for a presentation of data that highlights any philosophical or practical gaps (gaps in values or ideas) that may be present between teachers, students, and/or readers.

School as case. A school site could be viewed as a sub-case within the broader context of the study. As a part of the coding process, within-case analysis involved a comparison among the commentary of the three participating students at any given site, and a comparison between teacher and student data: To what extent do students from the same school site hold similar or different views or preferences for subject matter, overall intent, or modes of working? How does this relate to the preferences or philosophies expressed by their teacher?

Students as case. A cross-case analysis of student responses highlighted particular artistic preferences, influences, topics, or modes of working that were addressed by students in multiple settings. In instances where students across sites addressed themes or ideas not highlighted by other participant types, such data might offer a window into a distinctly "adolescent" set of motivations, philosophies, or modes of working.

Teachers as case. Teacher commentary across sites was compared to similar effect as the student cross-site analysis. In this case, the primary purpose was to detect whether there were particular aspects of teachers' descriptions of the ideation and development process associated with the APSA Sustained Investigation process that were consistent across teacher commentary in all four sites, but were less prevalent in the responses of other participant types. Such similarities related to teachers' practical recommendations for methods of idea development, as

well as their more philosophical commentary on the purpose of the Sustained Investigation as a whole, and the qualities of a meaningful student investigation of a topic or idea.

Readers as case. A similar analysis was applied to the commentary of the four portfolio readers participating in the study as well. All APSA readers are themselves educators at the AP or college level. One might expect that individual biases or preferences for one mode of working over another might naturally emerge in their practices as artists and educators, and that such preferences might be mitigated by their training as readers, wherein evaluators are extensively trained on applying the AP rubric to student work, and are explicitly told to separate their own artistic sensibilities from the process of scoring student work. In other words, a certain level of consistency in reader commentary might be expected. It is this expectation of consistency that invites comparison and analysis, however—either between the readers as a group, or between readers and teachers as the two sets of adults weighing in on student choices and processes. If there is a consistently reader-centric view on the processes of effective ideation and investigation (and truly, even if there is not consistency in reader commentary), how do the readers' expectations or hopes for students' experiences of the Sustained Investigation compare with the philosophies and expectations put forth by teachers?

Comparison of reader, teacher, and student commentary. The richest source of findings, of course, lies the comparison of the commentary of all three groups of participants. If any teacher-specific, student-specific, or reader-specific modes of thinking and working were detected in earlier stages of analysis, it is here that those findings were most effectively juxtaposed with one another. In some cases, such comparisons have the effect of reinforcing one another; in others, they highlight apparent contradictions in teacher, student, and reader values, philosophies, and assumptions about creative processes and practices.

Chapter Summary

This chapter established the information that was needed in this study, outlined the contributions of earlier pilot research to the design of the study over time, and described the particular methodology and methods used in the study. I provided a rationale for a qualitative design for this research, in particular a multi-case study. Next, the chapter included a detailed overview of site and teacher selection, as well as methods for sampling student and reader participants. An overview of data collection methods noted that retrospective post-then-pre interviews as the primary method, and overviews of the protocol designs for teach, student, and reader interviews were provided. Data analysis procedures, in particular coding processes for interview data, were described, and issues of ethics and validity as they relate to interview procedures were addressed. The following chapters will present the results of these interviews and will outline themes that emerged in the analysis of the data.

Chapter IV

FINDINGS: PRIVATE SCHOOL

The independent school profiled in this chapter is located outside of a major northeastern city and serves both day and boarding students, including many international ones, in grades 6-12. Participants here included Sandra, the AP Studio Art teacher, who had been teaching for nearly 30 years, about ten of which had been spent at this school. She put me in touch with three of her recent graduates who had just submitted AP portfolios: James, Meghan, and Vanessa. I held interviews with all four participants via FaceTime or Skype, so I never visited the campus in person. The school's web presence offers a glimpse of student life—a glimpse that is, of course, carefully curated, but that nonetheless gives a sense of the opportunities and expectations that surround them. The promotional photos on the web recall iconic images of college campuses: ornate, 19th-century stone buildings, expansive green lawns, stained glass. The site also gives a sense of the breadth of experiences that are available to students here. In the arts alone, facilities include dance studios, a two-story art studio, media and photo labs, and a 500-seat theater. There are six faculty members in the visual and media arts, with more than 20 available courses at the upper school level, including one titled *Installation Art: Body, Space, and Time*. Opportunities abound.

The school describes its pedagogical approach as being centered on the Harkness method: discussion-based, with all students in a class situated around a large oval table. They recently hosted a TEDx conference, organized and presented by students, including Meghan, one of the participants in this study. In other words, finding and using one's voice, and being a part of a community of scholars, is central to the experience here. The students I spoke with created the

impressions that one would imagine they would create: they were self-assured, driven, used to sharing their ideas and taking them seriously.

When the AP Studio Art students were not shoulder-to-shoulder around a seminar table in their other classes, they worked side by side in a studio that their teacher described as being similar to a barn, "but not rustic in any way." The structure indeed includes soaring ceilings, tall windows letting in natural light, and grouped tables for more formal instruction, as well as independent studio space for advanced students. Sandra admitted that her students were "super-duper lucky" to have such a facility where they could work uninterrupted, and where they only needed to clean up when their space was in danger of becoming a fire hazard. Students here seem to think big, and take on a lot, but conversations with them reflect that they are interested specifically in the big things that truly matter to them. As they navigated their Sustained Investigations, it seemed that the question of whether or not they could pull this off never really occurred to anyone; of course they could. At the same time, the students here are not adults. They are not especially precocious. They are very much teenagers, with teenage ideas and sensibilities. They are just fully present in the roles of thinkers, and the roles of artists at the same time, and know that they belong in these roles.

Portrait: James

James is a photographer who had just completed his senior year when we spoke. He had plans to major in photojournalism when he set off for college in the fall, and he had been honing his skills throughout his high school experience in a self-taught as well as school-based way. He spoke to me from his room, where there was a framed David Bowie album cover hanging on the wall behind him. This is memorable particularly because James himself bears a passing

resemblance to Bowie. He propped the phone up to talk with me, moved it, adjusted it again, and often turned himself to one side, as he seemed to be typing while simultaneously continuing our conversation. He was never disengaged, though, merely multitasking, and somehow this activity never broke his stride in speaking about his work in thoughtful detail, and at length, even if he rarely looked directly at the camera. James had a calm and measured manner of speaking—slow, and without a lot of inflection. His dry delivery made some lighter comments even funnier: at one point, he recalled that during a photo shoot earlier that year, "we covered this girl's face in glitter, which is, like, *such* a process."

Before describing his Sustained Investigation, James explained that this body of work was one of three independent photography projects that he took on this year. The previous summer, he found that he had two Sustained Investigation ideas that he felt were especially promising, so he chose one for his AP portfolio but then decided to pursue one as an independent study, "sort of as a backup." Later in the spring, as others were scrambling to finish their work on time, he also did a series of photo shoots for a fashion magazine that he put together with friends, just for fun.

James could encapsulate his Sustained Investigation in one word: *skin*. The work was an examination of the idea of skin, and the idea grew from a single photograph that he had taken the previous summer. He shared the story of how this project came to be:

> I went to Senegal the summer before my senior year. All the people there have really nice skin, and I took this photo of my host brother's cousin while we were swimming and it makes him look like a statue. He had his arms up above his head... and the water from the pool on his skin and the way the sun was hitting, it made it look very—not that it wasn't human, it just made it look very intense. I just became obsessed with the way—the detail that it can make it, and how especially the sun can make skin look really—I don't even know what the word is, but it just makes it look very interesting, and I just wanted to take something that is super simple to us and that we obviously take very much for granted, like anyone's skin, and really focus on it and make something super detailed out of something so simple to us.

It is notable that not only was the Sustained Investigation birthed from a single image, but it began from a visually engaged place: the image sparked *something*, even if he could not articulate what at the outset.

James explained that he began with the broad theme of skin on purpose: “It was very, loose, which I like, because I like to... make sure that I’m doing things structured in my own way, to test myself and challenge myself a little.” Within the theme, he built more boundaries for himself: “The only rule was, no two photos the same—the same type of subject, content. I didn't want anything to relate too much.”

He shared how in pursuing this work, he took this broad concept of skin and kept turning it over and over in his mind. “It wasn’t exactly research,” he said. “It was just what happens. I would sit and think to myself, like daydreaming, *where can I take this*? And then sometimes it also became, *what can I be doing to people’s skin*?” He had two foundational photos—the portrait of the man in Senegal, and another one of a man suntanning with a reflector in Washington Square Park—and explained that “it just kicked off so much.”

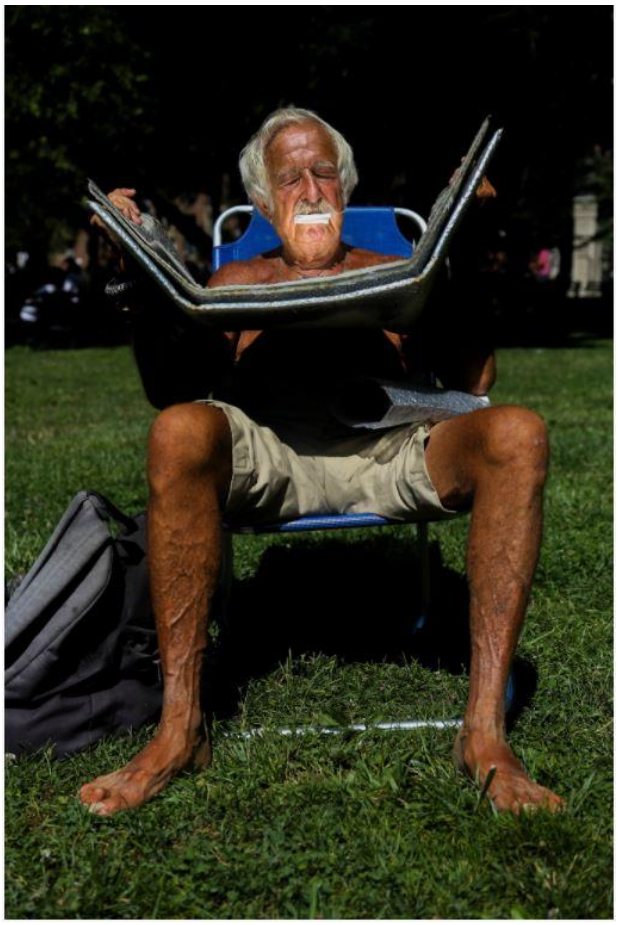
As one idea followed another, and as he continued to brainstorm about what people could do to their skin, or how he might approach the theme of skin, ideas branched out about where he could go or who he could photograph that would add new dimensions to the idea. “I wanted to overdo it,” he said,” so I could make it really good.”

The project evolved over time. He spent time photographing “old people on the beach,” and got permission to take pictures in a tattoo parlor. Later, the project expanded even beyond the focus on human skin: his portfolio eventually included images of snake skin and fruit skin. “I went into the project thinking it would just be human skin,” he explained, but “I wanted to see how far I could stretch it.”

He had started, then, simply by making a lot of work, attacking the theme of skin from every angle he could imagine. Eventually, he started drawing connections among his images: “I wanted to make it so that somehow, in a weird way, skin of a fruit is similar to skin of a human, and getting a tattoo is similar to getting a suntan. Both are damaging but we still do it. Skin can sometimes be [about] pride—like, who’s more tan? Who has more tattoos?”

Figure 2

Student art: James



This work began to overlap with the other two photo projects he was pursuing that year. The independent study or “backup” Sustained Investigation was on the topic of aliens: again, thinking as broadly as possible about the variety of meanings that can be associated with a single

term. The other project was the fashion magazine that he put together with peers. “I went to Fashion Week to take pictures on the street of people. I thought it was very interesting, like how ridiculous some people can be, just the elegance that they hold themselves to in their clothing, and I found it really interesting and I was like, I think this is cool, but I want to make it my own.” The photos in all three series cross-pollinated, as his interests and sensibilities converged—fashion photos became about alien-like qualities that involved altering the skin of the models. “The way I’ve seen a lot of things in fashion,” he explained, “are making things look like—not pretentious, but I see it as otherworldly, and a lot of times they can use things like aliens as jumping-off points.” This was the project that involved covering a friend’s face in glitter. For another image, he explained, “I bought this cheap... sun visor on Amazon, and glued diamonds all over it, and then glued diamonds on the model’s face.” He explained this as a growth and departure from his earlier work: initially he had meant to document things that happen to people’s skin, but then he said he started to ask himself how he might alter the skin of his subjects too.

The process of going out to ever-more interesting places to find subjects that related to his ideas became a defining aspect of James’s Sustained Investigation. He expressed an ongoing desire to “make the photos more and more interesting,” and this translated to putting himself in more and more unlikely situations. He explained that “I like to be curious and explore,” and that this curiosity defines “who I am as a photographer, but also who I am overall.” He went on,

> I went to a motorcycle show and a lot of different stuff to make the subjects as interesting and as unique as possible, which has been a big part of it for me. I can use my camera and taking pictures to go cool places and meet interesting people. That’s always been the coolest part of photography for me. I’m trying to go to this Mexican wrestling thing in the Bronx this weekend, which I would never dream of going [to] if I wasn’t going to do photos, it’s just not something that I would do, but that’s fitting for how—I’m always trying to find something more interesting to take pictures of, and this is one of those things. I don’t really know exactly how to describe it. That’s just what I do now.

For James, the Sustained Investigation was as much a vehicle for defining his artistic process as it was an exploration of a particular idea. The body of work was an organizing theme that let him explore the world, develop his point of view and interests as a photographer, experiment, and see what he could do. His personal formula, whether in AP work or personal work, was to take a loosely defined theme, get curious about it, and go out into the world to see where he could find that idea reflected. The work itself had conceptual meaning, but it had personal meaning as well, as it defined him as a photographer.

In preparing to submit his AP portfolio, James drafted his written statement about the ideas central to his work, and the ways that he investigated them throughout the process of creating it. The way he described it, putting the meaning of his photos into words was a process completely separate from making the work, and it had to come later. "I have to make the stuff first. If I have the photos first, then I can write about it."

In his statement, he said, "I talked about how the photos connected to each other, like how the variety—these are very different things, but they all relate, is basically what I was saying," He also reiterated the connections between human skin and other kinds of skin, or between processes of beautifying and damaging one's skin.

Although he was deeply reflective and inventive in his approach to working with the idea of skin, and the work resulted in juxtapositions of images that deepen the concept considerably, this conceptual depth seemed almost incidental to James in the ways that he described his work. "I find myself to be better going out and taking pictures, and taking pictures," he said. "I'm not very good at being like, 'why did I take this picture?' I like it, that's why."

James did have another significant *why*, however, when thinking about the meaning that the topic of skin had to him personally. Quite late in our conversation, he mentioned:

> I had god-awful acne, and while I was doing the project, I was on this very intensive acne medication that once and for all gets rid of your acne. And for a while I was very insecure about my acne and I'm no longer insecure about it because I have none left, but basically that was another motivator for me. It's because I've always—it wasn't like a huge part of my life at all, but I've always kind of not liked my skin which is why I think I was more aware to the beauty of the skin in Senegal.

He left this story out of his written statement, deeming it unnecessary in the face of a limited word count. "If I had more space, I would have written about that in my AP Studio Art Concentration statement, but basically, a big part of it has always been an internal motivation." In his view, this internal motivation was less important to share with an outside audience.

When describing how he thought about success in the Sustained Investigation, or how he knew when he was satisfied with his work, James reiterated his lack of interest in framing it conceptually: "I don't always try and make it have a huge overall message and moral. It's just like, I like taking photos, so therefore it comes together... it doesn't have to say something, it can just be visually appealing, I think."

Several times, he returned to this idea that the value or success of his work was to be defined in his own terms. Although he cared that viewers like his work—when describing the fashion magazine he admitted that "we just basically wanted to impress everyone at school"—he clearly still considered himself to be his own primary audience, and structured the Sustained Investigation mostly to satisfy his own curiosities and ambitions. "Everything is sort of for a better portfolio for me," he said, "but that's not what I'm focused on. I'm just doing it 'cause I find it cool." He linked his work to broader professional ambitions: he planned to major in photojournalism but had this interest in things like fashion photography as well. "What I wanted to show to the College Board," he said, "was I have a lot of different routes with my work." Establishing his point of view, and communicating that, was what he wanted to bring to evaluators. He was adamantly opposed to the idea that his intent might bend based on an

assumption of reader expectations, and he recalled that his teacher had reinforced this idea, paraphrasing her advice to him as, “don’t think of it like it’s just for the College Board, it’s still your project and you don’t have to—you know what I mean? It’s still for you.”

When describing his advice for other AP students as to what makes a good Sustained Investigation, James said that ideally the body of work will be a “comfortable challenge”—an opportunity to grow and stretch as an artist, but also something that the student is genuinely interested in, something that “feels natural,” and something that can realistically be completed in a few months’ time. It is work that begins with attention to your own interests and sensibilities as an artist; in his own terms, “it’s still for you.”

The things that James never referred to in our conversation are notable: there were very few comments describing any kind of structured class activities or assignments related to fulfilling the Sustained Investigation, or even critiques. His narrative implied that he seemed to have taken on this work, even within an AP class, almost as an independent study. He formulated his ideas in the summer in order to start early, and by the start of the school year he knew that he wanted to pursue this idea of skin, and he had some images to get himself started. He said that over the summer, he had emailed Sandra to get her initial thoughts on his ideas, and once he had her support he took off running: “her saying that it [the idea] was good was enough for me. If she approves of it, it should be good enough. So then I sort of just took her word for it and went off with it.” When speaking about his teacher, he explained that her role was like that of “an advisor,” but that she did guide the development of his work in specific ways:

> [T]he one thing she wanted to guide me towards was she wanted me to do some more experimental stuff with my portfolio, in Concentration and in breadth because she was always talking about—the more experimental and abstract and creative you can get, the better for the portfolio, just for the College Board reading it, but also just in general it’s better to do that. So that was one thing she was trying to drive home to me was, your work is already decent, so you might as well push yourself farther.

It was on Sandra's advice that he considered expanding his project to include non-human skin, and arranged and photographed fruit peels to see if this might be a new direction that could interest him. Another bit of advice that he gleaned from their conversations was the need to be "super concise and very clear," expressing both visually and in writing, "what your message is and how your work all comes together." In addition to being an advisor, she was perhaps an editor as well, then; in either case she was seen as a sounding board who helped to give shape to his ideas and to translate the expectations of an outside audience when needed.

The prospect of getting more experimental was not far off from James's own goals for himself—to see how far he could take his ideas, how unconventional he could get. It is a philosophy he carried into his ongoing work as a photographer, explaining that "photography is not an easy art, but it's an art that it is not hard to really go far. I feel like all I have to do is have a camera and go places. I might as well go far."

Private School: Students

In addition to James, two more students were interviewed: Meghan, who is also a photographer, and Vanessa, who completed a 3-D portfolio with an emphasis on fashion design. Examining processes and philosophies of these three students alongside one another allows for insight into the distinctions between individual and collectively held notions of what ideas are and how they define the creation of a body of work.

Defining Ideas

The students at this school shared an interest in clarifying and asserting their own voices and points of view as artists, but they had distinctly different approaches to defining the ideas

that lay at the center of their Sustained Investigations. It is clear that their ideas were not the product of a formalized or ritualized ideation process. Beyond that, the central anchor—the word or concept or idea or intent that formed the basis of the Sustained Investigation—is very different for each student. Each student's entire orientation to the idea of an idea is highly individual.

Word or theme as idea. James had a word—*skin*—that served as his anchor, and his Sustained Investigation was built around considering the idea of skin, and issues around skin, as broadly and inventively as possible. The word became an organizer, but he found that it also allowed him to push his own boundaries as an artist, as he re-examined his own assumptions that work about skin needed to relate solely to human skin.

Social issues and juxtaposition as idea. James's classmate Vanessa wanted to merge her interest in fashion design with political and social issues, making handbags or garments that overtly referenced contemporary themes and ideas. She described a bag about "division of politics" that she was especially proud of:

> On one side that had blue with the donkey and then on the other side that had red with the—I embroidered the elephant... and then it had parts of Pledge of Allegiance on the side that I thought the government wasn't really adhering to anymore. And that was super fun. I love that piece.

While James was guided by a word, Vanessa's work was organized by effective juxtapositions of visual representations of a range of subjects, including not only politics, but environmental concerns, the opioid crisis, and immigration issues, among others.

Relationships as idea. Meghan is a photographer like James, and she made a series of photos that reflected her relationships with significant people in her life. At different points, she described this work as being about "the idea of softness," and an interest in "capturing photos of people only I could take." These photos often caught the subject in an unguarded moment that reflected something that they had shared with Meghan. It was also a way to document new and

significant relationships: Meghan shared that she was donor-conceived and had recently found and met several half-siblings. A few of her portraits were of them. She explained that she had known one of her half-siblings for four years, “but it’s like we’ve known each other our entire lives.” There was another that she had only very recently met in person. She documented relationships that had changed over time as well, photographing people with whom she had once been close, but had become distant.

Each student artist’s approach was personally defined, not developed according to any standardized ideation process. The resulting idiosyncrasies allowed each artist’s identity to shine in even the conceptualization of the work. The ideas at the heart of each Sustained Investigation were deeply personal even when they were not explicitly autobiographical.

Elaborating on earlier work. While they did not describe any set ideation processes or guidelines, all students from this school were united in pursuing a Sustained Investigation that stemmed from an earlier assignment or work of art that they had created beforehand. James used his photo from Senegal as a launching pad into an investigation of the idea of skin, and Vanessa described an earlier project where she had designed a giant sculpture of a shoe. Her initial Sustained Investigation idea was to design twelve pairs of shoes around different social themes or topics, and this expanded to include different garments and items, like bags or dresses. Eventually, the shoes were eliminated altogether, but the idea began there. Meghan cycled through a few ideas before revisiting and combining two earlier assignments to spark her Sustained Investigation:

> [W]e had to take one roll of film and just photograph one person. There was someone else in my class who had taken a photo of her cousin. It was a photo that no one else could have taken, and we were talking about that, and then I kind of got stuck on that concept and I couldn’t think of anything else. We had this other assignment where we had to take... two or three rolls where we had to shoot kind of just our life—like our life through a lens, where we would just stop in certain moments and just take a photograph

> of whatever it was. I kind of loved that, and that was kind of the personal part of it. And then the other part was the capturing one person, and I think that kind of combined into... capturing my life through capturing my relationships with people, through kind of just the typical moments. Or less staged than a portrait but able to capture enough. And that just kind of caught me, and it kind of just got developing from there.

All of the students, in other words, took the Sustained Investigation as an opportunity to reflect on something that had sparked their interest earlier, and prepare a body of work that elaborated on that somehow.

Defining Process and Practice

Aside from defining their ideas themselves, students described the methods or processes through which they approached those ideas, and also how these processes contributed to the overall meaning of the work. Like these ideas, these processes varied according to each individual. The students expressed a certain confidence in their ability to find their own methods of working, and in identifying the particular aspects of creating that were most important to them.

Asserting one's own point of view. James was adamant about "wanting to make sure I'm doing things structured in my own way;" as his Sustained Investigation unfolded. His own process included visiting new places, which he described as a practice that was somewhat related to research. He identified these excursions as a central component of his work as a photographer and talked about his camera as the thing that lets him go to new places and meet all kinds of people that he would not otherwise meet. These experiences seemed central to his identity as a photographer—in his words, "that's just what I do now."

Focusing on the experience. For Meghan, defining her subject matter was her first exercise in identifying her preferences as an artist: "What I kind of figured out was with film, I'm much more interested in photographing people than things, and I'm still not really sure

why." Like James, Meghan was very much interested in the experience of making the work; the interactions with her subjects are where the meaning resided. She described her Sustained Investigation primarily in terms of developing a photographic process that was entirely new to her—a method for setting the conditions that made the subjects comfortable enough that she could capture what she wanted in the portraits. She spoke at length about figuring out this approach, and it seemed to be the heart of the entire endeavor for her:

> A lot of the times I would set up the situation and make sure that I had my camera out... so it became part of the situation and then I would talk to them a lot of the times about something that was either personal to us or a memory or something where it was like whatever they were doing, they were thinking about me and them at one point—at whatever point our relationship was like then.

She spoke about photographing a cousin on a rooftop of a space that was familiar to him, and having a conversation with him about a personal trauma that he had not disclosed to many other relatives:

> The background was not only interesting, it's where he felt comfortable. The conversation was something very intimate, like something he didn't talk about with other people for years... Because he was taking me there to shoot, I had [the camera] in my hand. That's kind of how I practice I guess, having it in my hand and shooting.

Meghan's observation that "that's kind of how I practice" is remarkably similar to James's remark that "that's just what I do now," when referring to his photography-related excursions.

Developing personal structures. For Vanessa, a struggle to defining her process was simply to narrow down a direction for her work. She identified additional challenges in coming with ideas for multiple individual works that related to her overall interest in expressing social commentary through works of fashion. She reported that she initially felt frustrated by the limitations of accessible materials, or materials that she could work with successfully, but then realized that these limitations gave her manageable parameters to work within. Her formula for creating became to identify the issue that she wanted to embody sculpturally, and then to push

herself to find ways to be inventive with all of the materials that she might have access to at the school to make it happen. “I had all these ideas of things I wanted to talk about,” she said, “but I couldn’t manifest it in anything until I was under pressure.” She realized the need for structure, limitations, and the ability to experiment freely.

> I was looking at these materials and had a deadline, and something had to happen. And it just kind of came together: hey, that looks like blood, like you’re dealing with stuff with pocketbooks, why don’t you make something on—originally it was supposed to be on people getting addicted to medicine while you’re in the hospital and then when you leave—so I was supposed to create some sort of hospital bag. So it was just like, all right, this was a topic you want to do, your sister’s diabetic, you have sharps at home, just go for it. And as I was making it, the shape of the handbag and like all that just sort, of it just kind of came to me by... how much cardboard I had to work with and the material always for me... really speaks on what I can do. If I was in a craft store I’d be completely lost for direction and because I would have no limitations.

Daydreaming and intentional playfulness. Although Vanessa described a need for the pressure of deadlines, all three artists from this independent school also spoke about moments of playfulness or intuition in their approach, and of ideas that come up during periods of experimentation or daydreaming. Student commentary in this vein acknowledged that these lower-pressure experiences often yielded some of their favorite work. James spoke about the significant role of daydreaming (using that term specifically) as he mapped out his ideas, framed by a question of “how far can I take this?” Vanessa opined that “my best work is play,” referring to times when she experimented with materials and ideas. She described venturing into science classrooms to scavenge plastic tubing or cork stoppers, and experimenting with combining these materials in her handbag to see what solutions and possibilities for her work might emerge. Meghan also described a kind of intuition that guided her work, saying that

> A lot of my art is driven by impulse, like if I’m in class and am kind of thinking about it—I’m brainstorming. But then there are sometimes where I just go, *oh my god*, and then I just start jotting down everything, planning it out. And [those are] always the ones that I end up following through on.

Writing and process. This group of students was consistent in their view of writing as non-essential to the process of developing a Sustained Investigation. For everyone, it seems to have been a later step, undertaken primarily with the goal of communicating with an outside audience, rather than for their own benefit. Meghan recalled that when she drafted her statement,

> What I said was, I ended up capturing the seven different types of Greek words for love. I don't remember the names of them now, but basically the Greeks believed that there were different types of love that existed in our lives and where—I don't know, I just find it super interesting.

In the course of describing her work to me, Meghan never organized her ideas or goals in these terms. She talked instead about the idea of softness, and of her role in the photographic process, and of capturing relationship to the subject. Both of these frameworks for understanding her work may describe her intent accurately, but it is notable that she described her Sustained Investigation in different terms for different audiences.

James noted that he needed to make the work first, and then he could write about it. His comments expressed a certain degree of freedom in not exactly knowing the full extent of what your work might be about while making it, and then allowing space and time to examine it afterward and let the meaning clarify itself.

Personal Definitions of Success

The definition of one's Sustained Investigation idea, and the description of the process of pursuing that idea, are both separate considerations than the personal markers for success within this work. Students were asked to speak about their own ideas of success or personal satisfaction for their Sustained Investigations: when did they know they were proud of their work, or at least content with it?

Taking on something ambitious. As all three students described their work, it became clear that they were not afraid of challenging themselves, and that rising to these self-defined challenges were often where they found the greatest rewards in their work. This was sometimes related to excellence in artistic techniques, but it extended beyond that as well.

James spoke with pride about creating a fashion magazine within just a few weeks' time. To his friends, he said, it appeared seemingly out of nowhere, but that it was the result of dozens of hours of envisioning and carrying out elaborate photo shoots, and art-directing the results to form a cohesive whole. It was a project that he knew would stretch his abilities, and he was proud to have pulled it off. Of his Sustained Investigation, he mentioned several times that he "wanted to see how far I could go," explaining at one point that "I always equate that to it being more interesting. So that was sort of the goal."

Vanessa described her work in similar terms, especially noting that she took on projects that involved especially labor-intensive materials and process that she had never used before in her Sustained Investigation. She wanted not only to learn these techniques and processes but to master them. "I'm big into technique," she explained. "I like when things look right." One of her pieces had an embroidered component, and she recalled carrying it with her everywhere as she worked on it, including on trips for sports competitions. In that instance, she said, "[when] I saw it really come together, that felt really successful for me. I felt very affirmed that my time actually went into something... [it] felt great when it paid off."

Photography was not a new process for Meghan, but in her case, she explained that she stretched her own abilities by developing an entirely new approach to the process.

Connecting with others. In describing the aspects of the work that made them feel the most proud or successful, all three students spoke in different terms about the rewards of finding

meaningful connections with others. Meghan's work was completely rooted in this notion of connection, as its primary goal was to document something about the nature and significance of the relationship she had with each of her subjects. James's process was different; he described the ways that photography became a vehicle to visit new places and meet new people, and that this was central to his practice. In his more immediate surroundings, he also saw his art as a kind of social currency: part of the reason that the fashion magazine project was so ambitious, he said, was that "we just basically wanted to impress everyone at school."

For Vanessa, the meaningful connections were rooted in communication to an audience. She wanted viewers to understand the ideas that each piece was concerned with, and to respond to it. She described the importance of this response when she spoke about her friends attending a fashion show that featured her work: "people either got it or they didn't, and if they didn't, they were like, 'what was that?' I thought that I had completely failed. But for the ones when they were like, 'I totally get it, it's so cool,'—that was like, *heck yes, you did a good job*."

Influence of Audiences

Students were, of course, aware of viewers beyond their peers and themselves as well. In particular, they described the role and influence of AP readers and their teacher as audiences for their work. In general, they placed little stock in the possible opinions of outside evaluators, who were, after all, strangers. In contrast, they looked to their teacher as a trusted counselor and advisor, even in her translation of reader expectations as they navigated their work.

Reader as audience. Although the students expressed an awareness of outside viewers, and an interest in things like impressing their friends, they were clear in their beliefs that they were their own primary audiences, and that they did not place much stock in external evaluation, including the reading. The work simply was not *for* the readers. In James's words, even though

the work would be seen and evaluated by others, “it’s still for you.” The students at the private school spoke about their written statements in a way that made it clear that they thought about this outside audience, but none of them spoke in terms of adopting perceived reader expectations as their own primary criteria for success in their work. For some of them, there was something almost morally questionable in altering one’s work, or choosing its direction in the first place, with reader impressions as a guiding force or influence. Meghan accepted that there might be aspects of her portfolio that would not come across to an audience of strangers, but that this did not diminish the personal significance of this work:

> The AP board doesn’t know my relationship with every person, and I’m very much against doing something, especially with art, for someone else. Like, doing something in my education for the person who’s going to be grading it.

Teacher as Audience. The students described Sandra as a supporting figure, and a sounding board for ideas. They valued her feedback and advice but felt that they had the freedom to sometimes go against her recommendations if they felt strongly about a particular direction for their work. This stance is in itself evidence of her influence as a teacher, as they explained that she described the Sustained Investigation as something that must be personally meaningful; if they could not articulate strong viewpoints about where they were going, something would have been wrong.

They described the benefits of Sandra’s support and feedback in different ways, but always in terms that made it clear she was a trusted expert advisor. James spoke of being reassured when she initially approved of his idea, and he jumped in from there: “her saying it was good was enough for me.” She also encouraged him to think of the concept of skin more broadly, giving his Sustained Investigation a second wind as he began photographing snake skin and fruit peels. Vanessa, in contrast, was especially grateful for Sandra’s ongoing words of encouragement, which sometimes showed up on post-it notes in her studio space. Meghan

described ongoing conversations with Sandra, often via text message, as she tried to commit to a direction for her Sustained Investigation. She trusted Sandra to give her honest advice on the ideas themselves, and also whether they were feasible in within the time constraints of the year.

What Makes a Good Sustained Investigation

Clearly, these three students had their own highly individual criteria for success in the Sustained Investigation, and notions of what makes an idea worthwhile or meaningful. In addition to these personal views, though, they were able to speak at a broader level on what makes a good Sustained Investigation. These thoughts were communicated as advice that they would give to other AP students just embarking on this process. Primarily, they argued, you have to care deeply about your idea, but you also have to be flexible enough to let it grow and evolve.

Lead with your own interests. James reasoned that a good Sustained Investigation "doesn't have to say something," that is, it does not necessarily need to be driven by a "message or moral." All students did agree, though, that the work should be united by some aspect in which the artist is personally invested, or in which the artist finds meaning. Meghan expressed this in the strongest terms: "especially with art, you have to be passionate about it. You're never going to be able to get through it and be happy about it if it's a chore. It has to be something you can chase, and that you want to chase." James described personal interest as doing something that "feels natural" and that is a "comfortable challenge."

Be flexible. Students from this school balanced their emphasis on personal buy-in with a warning that a certain degree of flexibility is needed to let ideas evolve and become stronger. Meghan expressed this as an analogy to friendship:

> When I was [starting] high school, I had someone tell me, your best friends in the beginning aren't going to be your best friends in the end, and that's very much how it is with studio art as well. The ideas you start with aren't necessarily the ideas you're going

> to end with—I mean, I completely changed my medium halfway through the year – and that's okay.

In many ways, James's continued self-questioning of *how far can I take this?* was about this willingness to let the work evolve and an eagerness to see what else it might become. They noted that the need for flexibility also applies to the ability to rethink your approach in the face of failure. Vanessa described this in terms of being able to "come up with something on the fly." She explained, "that way when something doesn't work out, because nothing ever works out right, you can improvise."

Private School: Teacher

Students here held both deeply personal practices and shared beliefs as to what make creative ideas worth pursuing. Their teacher, Sandra, shared her perspective on the structure and purpose of the Sustained Investigation, and the pedagogical practices she put in place to ensure that students could find their own artistic voices while strengthening a collective understanding of what they should be aiming for.

Defining the Sustained Investigation

To begin, Sandra described the ways that she explains the core qualities of the Sustained Investigation to her students—not only structurally what it is, but what it is meant to demonstrate. In her explanation of the ways that she introduces her students to this portfolio component, it became clear that in her classroom, the Sustained Investigation is "about" three elements: the linking of ideas and techniques, engagement with artistic habits of mind, and the feeling of being "captured" by an idea.

Mastery of ideas and techniques. Sandra described the Sustained Investigation as a "balance between mastery of materials and techniques, and conceptual ideas," and said that it should reflect students' "best work," again referring both to technical and conceptual rigor. When speaking about technical mastery, she reasoned that a degree of experimentation is also necessary, but that "you have to at least show that you're being intentional with those experiments."

Process and the studio habits. In describing that merging of technique and idea, Sandra also briefly touched on the studio habits of mind (Hetland, Winner, Sheridan, Veneema, 2007) as central to her teaching and to her understanding of the way that the Sustained Investigation functions. She referred to these habits in general terms, without going into detail on specific aspects of, for example, *engaging and persisting*, or *developing craft*, but she brought general references to the studio habits into the conversation multiple times. In doing so, Sandra acknowledged that the process of artmaking is about the development of habits and dispositions in addition to the making of works of art that are the physical evidence of exercising these habits.

Being "captured." Sandra returned several times to the idea that the Sustained Investigation reflects an area of interest that is almost a personal obsession, and that this interest is strong enough to carry one through the creation of multiple works without getting bored or veering off the path entirely. It is not merely this practical consideration that the idea must be viable in terms of supporting the creation of multiple works though; to Sandra, the point of following a theme or idea down a rabbit hole is that it leads the student to greater self-knowledge as an artist as well.

> [W]hen you create a body of work, a Sustained Investigation, it's because something really captures you. And a lot of things capture us on momentary levels on [a] daily basis. But every once in a while, you're in a situation where something just envelops you, and

> that investigation is really about discovery and unpacking your connection to that thing, that inspiration, and learning more about yourself through that discovery.

Markers of Success

As was true for the students, it became clear that a description of what the Sustained Investigation is, definitionally, is different from what makes one especially strong. Sandra spoke about what it might look like when a Sustained Investigation is going particularly well. These priorities might be thought of as pillars of her practice in advising and coaching students through this process.

Endurance. If the Sustained Investigation is about being "captured" by something, how might a teacher know when that has happened? Sandra described this as a depth of practice in a few different ways. First, she checks in with students as they formulate ideas to ensure that the areas of interest have enough conceptual substance to sustain them. She refers to this as "endurance":

> The most important word that I repeat again, and again, and again, is endurance. Does your idea have endurance? Can it last for 12 pieces? Can it be fresh each time? Do you have enough substance to endure this topic? We talk about, is the topic too broad? Or is it too specific that it might counteract that endurance and become redundant?

Finally, Sandra noted that she coaches students to continue experimenting as they work, to expand the ways that they visually explore the idea that has so interested them. She signals to students that the portfolio needs technical and process-based depth, in addition to evidence of sustained conceptual engagement. Here, she acknowledged an outside audience of readers, and the goal that students will exhibit the range of what they are capable of. "It's work that you feel like you've answered all the questions you've posed for yourself," she explained. She went on that the work should also demonstrate that you are "more than a one-hit wonder," meaning that the student should demonstrate willingness to work not only in a range of media, but also a range

of styles. She reflected that in addition to the entire body of work, individual pieces can have this quality of endurance:

> It's work that [is] really meaty. Each piece gives someone something to chew on for a long time. It's not work that a reader is going to just flip through one after another after another, they're going to want to stay. So each piece has staying power.

Showcasing technical skills. While it is important to Sandra for a Sustained Investigation to demonstrate a range of techniques, it is also expected that students will demonstrate a degree of technical mastery in this work. To carry this out, then, students must manage a tricky balance of expanding their technical expertise while not venturing out so far that the work may lack a degree of polish once it's completed. "If you're working with materials that you don't feel really at home with, really comfortable with," she reasoned, "maybe think about how you might use a different material." These visual indicators of technical competence include the accuracy with which subjects are rendered from observation: "So yes, you use your imagination and your ideation and your concepts, but if you're creating representational work, you want it to look legit, you don't want someone to look at a piece and say, 'ooh, that's awkward.'"

Originality. Sandra stressed that there may be many paths to developing an idea, or many forms of ideas that students could pursue. The only approach that she described as a complete nonstarter was when students were interested in making work based on the work of another artist. This could happen in a number of ways: sometimes students have proposed centering a particular artist at the center of their Sustained Investigation, perhaps making work in the style of that person. She explained that setting up a Sustained Investigation in this way was inherently limiting, and would not enable the depth of exploration that another area of focus

might afford: “I think that’s a waste of time, she said, “because you don’t ever know what that other artist is doing completely. And what does that have to do with you?”

In other instances, she shared concerns about students whose work might be based on the work of other artists through practices of (intentional or unintentional) appropriation. She acknowledged that cultural differences in norms of art education practice sometimes contributed to this tension. She recently had a student from China whose portfolio upon arriving at school included representational renderings copied from photographs, and Sandra described a process of “having conversations with the student about how that may be acceptable in China but it really doesn’t fly here.” She acknowledged that “that was really hard,” to appreciate the student’s obvious skill while explaining that the Sustained Investigation was about something broader than technical expertise—and that even in that work that represented technical mastery, the voice and vision of the student had to be more present in developing its content and subject matter.

Structures for Teaching the Sustained Investigation

Although the Sustained Investigation can naturally be a highly independent endeavor, Sandra explained that she employed a number of structures in helping students to navigate the process. First, she emphasized the natural cross-pollination and collective engagement that comes with working in an open studio environment, and cited this as a structure that benefits the development of the Sustained Investigation. In addition, she found that engaging students in structured ideation strategies, as well as in conversations about particular contemporary artists’ bodies of work, helped them to envision the possibilities for their own bodies of work. Finally, she described the nature of her own ongoing and informal one-on-one student feedback, which served to solidify their understanding of the qualities of a successful Sustained Investigation, and helped them to make firm decisions about their direction of their work.

Working independently, but in community. In terms of the day-to-day activity of students as they planned and carried out their Sustained Investigation work, Sandra described the open studio environment that her instructional space enables:

> We kind of clump everybody together, but then there's a lot of independent work that takes place, but they all share this space called the loft. And so they're all in their little studio areas with their work, either on their tables, on easels, on boards, on the floor in the case of the sculptors and they're able to see the development that each of them is experiencing at any time...They're able to use our class meeting time as intensive, collaborative discussion-based time and then have the studio available to them for a lot of the work. And because while I'm teaching, I live on campus, I am in the space also. I use the space also to make my own work.

She said that "we develop a very strong relationship as a group" through this combination of working in a communal way and devoting structured class time to responding to and discussing one another's work.

Discussions of bodies of work. Sandra explained that she introduces the Sustained Investigation by focusing on the concept of a body of work, allowing students to witness and discuss what it means for an artist to investigate an idea in a series of related works. It is vital to her that from the outset, her students understand this notion of focusing deeply on an idea for an extended time, and she deliberately builds extended discussion time to address this concept. In October of 2018, she shared a slideshow of Jennifer Bartlett's drawings from her Hospital series—window views drawn while she was a patient at a New York hospital.

> They're so dynamic and so emotional. Plus, technically, they're some of the most kick-ass drawings I've ever seen. I introduce the slideshow by saying, "This is an artist that I like a lot. I've followed her career for the last 40 years and this particular body of work that was shown at The Drawing Center in Soho, it really spoke to me in terms of the idea of a body of work, work around a theme, around an idea." And I showed the slides and I had them talk about it, and it was just kind of like, what do you see, what do you think this is about? Why do you think she made this? Talk about the color, does the color carry emotion, this and that. And we really spend a full period, which is an hour long, talking about these images, and I say very little. I have them go away with this homework assignment of, what constitutes a body of work for you?

In sharing artist examples and describing the creation of a body of work, Sandra noted multiple times that she wants students to understand this as an experience of being completely enveloped in the idea, returning to those notions of being "captured" or of work having "endurance." She explained that she returns to this theme throughout the course. She spoke about using Art:21 videos of Ann Hamilton to drive home this point:

> I want them to understand that idea of her practice being about this multisensory experience that starts with her feeling, and her thinking, and her smelling, and her touching, and her hearing, it involves every sense. I have them understand that that is studio practice. And that is what you are evolving into if you allow yourself that.

Sandra also shared an example with students from her own life and practice as an artist. She explained that her family background is Middle Eastern but that she traveled to the region for the first time as an adult:

> I went to Morocco; it was as close as I could get. I could hear people speaking Arabic, which was the first language I grew up with, and I could smell the spices, and I could taste the food, and hear the music. We ended up in this one town called Chefchaouen, which is blue, and it's blue because it was a tradition. I connected so fully with this place and with every sensory aspect of it from the terrain, [to] all the different aspects of the society, and it captured me. And when I came back, I was still there, I was still speaking French and Arabic here. I couldn't really eat anything other than hummus, and I was so in my head there, and I was trying to understand that. So I started making a series of encaustic paintings about the smells and the sights and that blue, that same blue.

Ideation strategies. Students, of course, would probably not arrive at these personally resonant central ideas without some coaching and guidance, and Sandra described the strategies that she uses to assist students in selecting and refining their ideas. Although none of the students mentioned this as a part of the process, Sandra noted that she has them begin making lists of potential ideas early in the year, around October. She also has them keep visual journals and asks them to revisit these journals and their earlier creative ideas to see if there is anything they might be interested in exploring further. The journals, she said, were always meant to be used "as a kind of collection ground," which may include art-based as well as non-art ideas. She also has

students write as they refine their ideas; these pieces can then become the basis of their final written statements. The ideas evolve as the writing evolves:

> I have them write loosely, more like stream of consciousness at first, and then we read them to each other out loud, and they give each other feedback on the ideas, but not on the writing per se. I also work with a faculty member, who is an English teacher, but whose job at our school is to look at how we use writing across all disciplines... And one thing, a practice that I do on a regular basis, is that I have the student read it out loud to both of us, me and the student, [and] think about how it sounds, and then I ask them a series of questions based on the flow of the writing and how specific it is, or how to make the language really more pointed, and we brainstorm that together, and that's just an ongoing process.

Student support and feedback. Since students spend so much of their time working independently, one of the most significant structures of Sandra's practice in managing the Sustained Investigation is her ongoing one-on-one communication with students. This feedback usually happens through in-person discussion of the work, although she noted that she sometimes also walks through the studio spaces to look at works in progress while students aren't there and leaves them short messages—"what I call 'love letters.'"

Feedback on structure and approach. In conferencing with students, Sandra noted, "I need to be very much in check with how I support, yet also create parameters." She discussed conversations with students where she guided them towards building more structure into their Sustained Investigations, hoping to help them gain clarity on exactly what they wished to explore, and to define the material and technical parameters that would help them get there. Sometimes, these conversations were guided by a concern that the student had taken on too much. Of Vanessa, she said,

> [A]t first she was all over the board with all these different fashion pieces. And I said, "Think about it, do you really need to diversify so much? Do you need to do hats and dresses and shoes and purses? Why not choose one or two vehicles to use to make these statements about?" And she was like, "Oh, what a great idea."

Sometimes the coaching that is needed is the opposite, in cases where students box themselves into an idea or approach that could be broadened and strengthened by further experimentation with material or concept. This came up this year with James; it was under Sandra's advice and guidance that he broadened his subject matter to include fruit skin. She conferenced with him after his first few photos in the skin series were completed:

> I said, "This is great, but is it enough to endure 12 pieces?" And then I [had] him start to think about other kinds of skin. So then he went into the studio with all kinds of lights and glass and mirror, and he brought some fruit and vegetables in, and he started peeling the skin and arranging compositions that way. He definitely got the mileage idea. He really understood what I meant by, "Do you have enough?"

Negotiating the direction of the work. The evolution of her students' Sustained Investigations is informed by Sandra's conversations with them, but she maintains that her advice is taken as suggestions, and students may choose to go in another direction. In recalling Meghan's Sustained Investigation, she described earlier ideas that were abandoned out of a lack of time, and also because Meghan was out of school on medical leave for a portion of the year. When she settled on her Sustained Investigation approach, she was adamant that her photography would be completely darkroom-based, "which was totally contrary to everything we had discussed and everything she made, and now it's February... I said, 'Would you consider some digital, would you consider some studio lighting?' She's like, 'All darkroom, all darkroom.'" She saw that Meghan had a direction and an approach in mind that she felt strongly about and let her pursue the work on her own terms.

Quality of work. A component of Sandra's discussion with students is pushing them to create work that is truly their best. She lets them know that sometimes this is a matter of putting in sufficient time to enable the work to be as strong as it could be:

> [T]he work makes them transparent. The work is the evidence. It tells me a lot about their motivation, their thought process, their working process. So that's the first part: how long did it take you to make this, and was that long enough? I can tell that you made

> this in two hours. [The work needs to] feel like it's the same level as the other pieces that you have. Is someone gonna be able to look at the collection and say, 'This is a favorite, this is a favorite, this one you didn't care about?' So that's important.

In a related way, Sandra returns to the notion of exhausting the idea, both in terms of media or technique and in conceptual exploration. In these cases, she says, her questions might be, "Okay, but what else?" Or how else can you reinforce that? You're alluding to the idea, but how you take it further." Her comments here bear an interesting resemblance to the questions that James said he repeatedly asked himself: *How far can I take this? Where else can I go with this?*

Representing the reader. In guiding students, Sandra was also mindful of the perceived expectations of readers, and the impressions that her students' work would create. She explained, "I want to balance what the students want with what I know the College Board is looking for, as far as I know that." She went on:

> It's much like a college portfolio. You want to show that you can do x number of different things. You want to show that you can really focus. You want to show that you can finish work. You want to show that you have multiple interests and you want to show that maybe you don't have a style yet per se, but you're thinking about that, you're developing that.

She also shared that the expectations of readers can be hard to discern. The scores that some of her past students have received have been baffling to her, and have been at odds with her own evaluation of students' work. "We've had kids who've won the Art Award for the school, who've gotten ones [on their AP portfolios]. And I was like, 'what?'" She said that students are curious about how the scoring process works as well: "in my history of teaching this class, [students] have always wanted to know, 'well, what do they want? What are they looking for?' It feels like there are a lot of big secrets."

The Purpose of the Sustained Investigation

Thinking more broadly, Sandra acknowledged some broader understandings about artistic practice that she hopes students will come to see as a result of completing a Sustained Investigation. These lessons further highlight her thoughts on the relationship between process and the cultivation of ideas. First, she expressed that she wanted students to "not be dismissive," explaining that, "you might have an idea, you might just scratch the surface and then be just like, 'Yeah, that's not gonna work out,'" but that if students then continue to explore, something more enduring could emerge. She also spoke about "structuring time," referring on one hand to the time management necessary to complete the portfolio on time. "Structuring time is so counterintuitive to creativity, but... it's part of life, it's part of everything." Beyond just meeting deadlines, though, she wanted students to think about the choices that they make in structuring their studio time as the choices that enable their work to grow and evolve; structuring time can be about finding your own process and practice as an artist:

> Chris Ofili goes into his studio each morning and sits for an hour and creates four or five little portraits before he starts his work, and that's his daily practice. That's the key and the entry point for all the other work to be born. So, I think developing that kind of discipline... whether it's about not throwing away your ugly babies, or not letting your time just get away from you, these are important things.

Chapter Summary

Student data presented in this chapter indicated that students at this independent school understood that idea can be described or approached in a number of ways—a theme or word, a visual juxtaposition, or an approach to documenting relationships. In defining their ideas, most students found value in building off of aspects of their previous work: identifying ideas or processes that interested them, and that they wanted to pursue further.

Students described the development of their own processes and methods for pursuing these ideas—finding and juxtaposing materials to represent political/social ideas, creating a method for documenting intimate moments with friends in non-intrusive ways, or planning local outings to document a range of interpretations of the subject of skin. These personally-defined approaches were often as central their conception of the Sustained Investigation as the central idea was.

In addition to the personal significance of process, students here described success in the Sustained Investigation as the taking on of an ambitious project, highlighting their personal drive and investment in this work. They also spoke of the rewards in connecting with others—whether subjects of their work or peers—as a driver of personal satisfaction and feelings of success. While they cared about these forms of connection, students were less concerned with other viewers, especially AP readers, and most commented that they did not make their Sustained Investigations with the readers in mind. They described their teacher as a confidant and collaborator: someone who helped develop their work rather than dictate its form or content.

In retrospect, students shared that the most important aspects of undertaking the Sustained Investigation were that the project was built from the artist's own personal interests and sensibilities, and that the artist remained flexible enough to allow his or her idea to evolve.

The teacher, Sandra, described the Sustained Investigation as a single body of work that merges the exploration of ideas with the mastery of technique. She noted that ideas must be deeply personally engaging—students should be "captured"—and that this work emphasized process as much as product. Successful Sustained Investigation ideas, in her view, had a quality of "endurance," meaning they could inform an entire body of work. They also served as a platform to showcase students' technical skills, and were original, not ideas that had been

explored by other students hundreds of times before. She described a number of structures that enabled her students' work to embody these qualities. First, the school's studio facility allowed students to naturally to respond to and inform one another's work in progress. She also presented students with ideation strategies and shared examples of bodies of work by professional artists. Perhaps most importantly, she gave ongoing feedback to students, on their overall approach to their work and possible next steps. She also advised students in ways to ensure their work was as technically strong as possible, and represented the reader point of view in bringing considerations related to the scoring process. These practices all served the broader understandings that she hoped students took away as the purpose of the Sustained Investigation: to structure their time and build their own practices as artists and to "not be dismissive" when considering what a worthwhile idea can be.

Chapter V

FINDINGS: PAROCHIAL SCHOOL

This school, and its associated church, sits in the center of an ultra-wealthy neighborhood in a major northeastern metropolis. Its student body—all girls, predominantly Black and Latina—are mostly from low-income families, traveling here from other parts of the city each day. The school has a total student population of about 350 girls in grades 9-12. The school's mission and structure, described on its website but also reflected in the physical space of the building, highlights not only academic excellence but the value of serving one's community. They place emphasis also on purposefully planning for the future, and it is a special point of pride that all students graduate and gain college admission, many at local schools.

I was able to visit this school in person to meet the student participants. In joining them in their space, I was reminded of the sounds of girls being girls—gossiping in the art room, playing music, laughing with each other. I was also reminded of the school's focus on service and community, as I was instantly struck by how exceedingly polite the students were: listening attentively, making small talk while walking me from the office to the classroom, expressing appreciation for being a part of this study. There was a permeating sense of their own awareness that they were representing their school community and faith community, and a sense of duty in making them proud.

The art room was a long space with clusters of tables organized mostly on one side, and with storage, display, and flexible work spaces staggered throughout. Laura, the school's only art

teacher, stationed her desk at the center. In the short time I spent in her room, she maintained an informal tone as she conferenced with students individually about the progress of their work.

Laura and I had met a few years prior, and she became a reader during the years when we were in intermittent contact. She continued to develop and refine the structure of her AP course according to her learnings from the reading and continued reflection on her own goals for her students, and their goals for themselves.

Portrait: Valery

Valery joined me on a video call from her bedroom at home. She had just graduated from high school and explained that she was heading to an art school in the city that fall, to major in advertising and marketing. The idea had opened to her when she participated in a summer program at the same college, focusing on international marketing. There, she created a proposal for a pop-up streetwear store in Korea. In contrast to that experience, she explained that she had also taken a couple of art classes in school ("some drawing, some painting"), and that she just enjoyed doing things like editing videos and making other personal art projects both in school and in her own time.

In spite of this clear direction, drive, and passion for her work, Valery was hesitant and soft-spoken when discussing her portfolio and experiences in the AP Studio Art course. I often had to prompt her several times to elaborate on her ideas. Like her peers, she was exceedingly polite as well: after the interview, when I sent her the transcript for review, she apologized "for my vagueness and timidness," but reassured me that "I know the study will turn out amazing."

As we dove into discussing her Sustained Investigation, Valery described an early idea that she had, on the topic of gentrification. This approach had been her teacher's suggestion:

“She knew where I lived, and she was like, ‘okay, there’s a difference between this neighborhood and this neighborhood, and you could possibly do your Concentration on this.” The idea was interesting to Valery, and she could envision some images that she would like to create: “I don’t know why, but I always imagined a brick wall, and then the two different types of people that lived in that neighborhood coming together.” She tried to make a few photos with this image in mind, but they did not turn out the way she imagined. She explained that while looking at her first few photos,

> Something in me was like, okay, these are good, but are they good enough to be put in AP? That’s when my whole thought process shifted, and I was like, I need to choose a new Concentration because this isn’t working for me. It was the pictures, they kind of looked similar. And I wanted them to have a difference in them. I don’t know, I just didn’t like how it felt....[The photos] didn’t feel like gentrification. It just felt like regular pictures. At first, I was excited, but then at the end I was like, I just don’t feel that anymore. It felt like a hassle to take those kinds of pictures.

Valery switched gears but did not abandon all aspects of her initial idea. She continued to document her surroundings, but her revised Sustained Investigation was focused on architecture, because, she reasoned, “I’m very fond of it.” She explained that this simplified idea let her focus on what she enjoyed about architecture, rather than trying to find ways to force every photograph to adhere to the theme of gentrification.

This slight shift from a focus on gentrification to architecture enabled Valery to make use of her personal photography, and to build on the strengths of some of her favorite images. She had recently traveled to Spain and Italy, and she explained that “the architecture there just fascinated me.” Working back at home in New York, she “tried to find buildings that were similar but also different,” to the ones that she had documented on her travels.

As Valery described this new idea, it became clear that she built a sub-theme into her process: she was looking for and responding to visual contrast in her surroundings. She described

an early photo of a white building next to a dilapidated road, and explained that she liked the comparison, “between how clean the building was and how... not dirty, but beaten the road was. I’ve always liked to see stark differences in things.” She described the creation of this photograph as more spontaneous than planned—she simply saw something that caught her attention and captured it, rather than specifically setting out to find stark differences. “I don’t know how to describe it,” she said at one point. “If a building has, not a weird, but just a different look than the rest, I tend to focus on it more.”

She described the switch to an architecture theme as a positive move, but admitted to “feeling a little iffy about it,” as she continued to worry whether she could develop a strong enough body of work. “For me, it was kind of a struggle,” she reflected, “because I’ve never been used to being given... my own creative lead on things.” As she wrapped up her Sustained Investigation, however, she remembered feeling “relief, because I was able to finish and do something that I actually cared about.”

Valery spoke at length about the role that her teacher played in shaping the Sustained Investigation. Laura provided structure for the process, acted as a counselor in motivating students to continue pursuing their ideas, and she represented the AP reader to her students, holding them to a high standard in executing their work.

In terms of structure, Valery explained that her teacher structured the course in a way that made the Sustained Investigation manageable and ensured that students were producing enough work. They had weekly assignments to take photos for their Sustained Investigation on weekends. Laura also organized “photo walks” in the school’s neighborhood during the school day, designed for students to capture more images for their body of work. She recalled that Laura

would point out potential subject matter to her students: “She’d be like, ‘Oh look, this building looks interesting, see what you can do with that.’”

Valery explained that Laura gave straightforward advice on what readers expected to see, and set a high bar for the quality of student work. Much of her feedback was focused on formal qualities of the images, and she advised students to create a large volume of work to make the selection process easier: “She told me anything you find that catches your eye... try to take as many close-up shots [and] faraway shots as you can, so...we can see which one works best.” Laura also created impressions among the students of what quality Sustained Investigations looked like; Valery described these as “strong images” as opposed to “plain images...like, ‘oh, here’s just a picture of a building.’”

Valery recalled conversations with Laura that left her feeling that her work was not yet up to par, or maybe that her images had too much of that “plain” quality—“it just felt like I wasn’t doing my best”—but added that Laura also offered concrete advice on how she might make her work stronger, which was helpful:

> She said that instead of doing it the way that you did it last time, maybe you could change your position of the picture, so maybe revisit where you took the picture and just try to tweak something, and what helped me is I was looking at the past image while taking the present image [and] thinking what she was talking about, like if the lines weren’t strong enough, if there wasn’t enough light.

Her descriptions of Laura’s guidance made it clear that she was a trusted counselor to her students as well. When Valery changed course in her Sustained Investigation, she said that Laura “honestly didn’t care, because she just wanted us to do what felt right to us. She didn’t want us to be forced to do something we didn’t like.” Reflecting on the Sustained Investigation process as a whole, Valery remarked:

> The most interesting thing to me about it was being able to see how [she] helped us, and actually cared for us. Because I know some teachers are just like, whatever, do what

> you want. But she actually helped us with the process and told us different ways we can look into things. And I also like the fact that I wasn't going through it alone and my peers were also struggling, so it felt like as if we were all united.

For as much as the advice to "do what felt right to us" resonated with Valery, she was also deeply aware of the presence of an eventual outside audience for her work, and said that the prospect of this outside scoring motivated her, even as it intimidated her a little. "If I'm being honest here," she reflected, "if it was just for school, I don't think I would have tried that hard." She remembered sharing her photos with classmates to determine whether they were strong enough to send in a final portfolio: "I literally went around asking everybody that I knew, "does this look AP ready?" She also recalled being intensely interested in seeing examples of high-scoring student portfolios on the AP website, and relating it to her own work: "obviously we're not going to know what they're thinking... but I just wanted to see how I could view it through my lens."

Writing was, of course, another component of her work to be submitted. Valery explained that she wrote her statement all at once, in the week just before submitting. She explained that in her statement, "I wrote that I wanted to capture the... I think the beauty of the building, and its quirkiness and uniqueness." She remembered that she talked about the elements of art and principles of design in her descriptions of her work, saying that "it sounded really technical when I was writing it, but it worked somehow." Valery reflected that if she were to write a statement entirely for herself rather than for a reader, she might have focused on different aspects of her work and process:

> I would have probably written about my shift in concentrations, and the emotional process I went through, but then thinking of what the reviewer would want to read, I was like, I don't think they really care about how I felt. So I just basically focus on the images alone and put a little bit of why I felt architecture was a good choice.

Although she panicked a bit when she changed course in her work, Valery realized upon reflection that this choice made her work stronger and solidified her belief in her own vision as an artist. This realization was so compelling that she identified this as the advice she would give to new AP students about to undertake their Sustained Investigations:

> I would tell them, at first they're going to have this one idea that just sticks with you, and you're going to make this whole plan based on it, but don't just stick to that one idea because there's so many that you could choose from....If you get hung up on that [first] idea, your thinking process is just going to turn out... It's not going be the same. It's going to feel like work. And that's not what you want it to feel like. You want it to feel like something that you're proud of and something that you actually care about.

Although she could be preoccupied with and intimidated by her perceptions of outside expectations, at the close of this process Valery valued the finding and strengthening of her own voice and explained that this is why the experience of the Sustained Investigation mattered: "it just felt like I was in control of my life, weirdly enough... like I was growing up. I just liked being in charge of what I wanted to do."

Parochial School: Students

I interviewed two additional students, also via video chat. All three of them were so committed to their art and design practices that they had plans to enroll in art schools in the fall. Sofia was heading off to the same college as Valery, but studying Interior Design. Gabriela, the third student, planned to attend another art school in the same city to study photography. Photography was a focus for all three girls in their Sustained Investigations, although Gabriela branched out to include mixed media in hers. They explained that this was not a coincidence—their teacher recommended photography as a process that would lend itself well to creating a Sustained Investigation, and had structured the course around this idea. In spite of this

uniformity of approach, they each found ideas and processes of individual relevance to carry them through the year.

Defining Ideas

Students here described their ideas in several terms: they described them in terms of topic, or subject matter, but also in relation to materials and process. They also discussed the fact that their ideas evolved and changed over time.

Topic as idea. Sofia's Sustained Investigation was somewhat similar in nature to Valery's: not only was their work defined by its subject matter, this subject matter in both cases was architectural in nature. Whereas Valery described her work as being about architecture more generally, Sofia focused on windows in particular. Similar to Valery, Sofia was motivated by finding variety and surprises in her surroundings, within an architectural landscape that at first seemed to be all the same: "there's different types of windows," she explained, "so there's a lot of distinction between [them], and it gives background to... the area or the building." Although Laura's planned photo walks were somewhat helpful in pursuing her ideas, Sofia felt that her best work was produced when she went out independently on weekends, in different neighborhoods, to capture more photos.

Process as idea. Gabriela had a Sustained Investigation that was a mixed media endeavor—a 'zine that grew out of a project that she started in a program at the International Center for Photography. The pages of the 'zine began with her photographs but included sewn and collaged elements, and she described the central idea as "youth and the pattern of growth that comes with it." She explained the ways that she wanted her artistic processes to metaphorically represent the idea of growth and transformation: "In the images, I would put elements of sewing on the page, or just something that shows growth and repetition and stepping

back as a representation of you being a kid, and then stepping forward as a teenager, and [then as] an adult." Gabriela explained that she wanted the work to represent not growing up in general, but growing up as a girl in this particular city. In contrast to her peers, then, Gabriela framed her idea in terms of a concept—growing up—as well as particular subject matter—her friends and people close to her.

Evolution of ideas. All students described a feeling of hesitancy at first, as they were unable to clearly envision what they were aiming for in their Sustained Investigations. While Valery dealt with this by altering her central idea, Gabriela described working somewhat intuitively and "just trusting the fact that I would come around to something." After creating the first page, she remembered, "I just continued adding to it, and then by the fifth page, I had a really set-in-stone idea." Part of this process of "coming around" to her idea was responding to and building on the visual material that she captured photographically or collected around her; she recalled saving a scrap of paper that had the phrase "good company" printed on it, and that these words gave her direction:

> What is good company? What is good company to a person that is growing up? What is good company to anyone? And my good company was the friends in my life, so I kind of wanted to throw off of that.

Sofia initially doubted that her window idea could sustain an interesting body of work, but she grew more interested after having a conversation with Laura about the ways that she could use windows to contrast the different neighborhoods that she encountered daily:

> I live in [neighboring area] but I've always gone to school in the city, so I've gone back and forth between the states my whole life. And she said maybe [I could focus on] windows here and in the city, and seeing differences in the architecture, and the differences of living between both states.

This feedback encouraged Sofia to explore different parts of the city and to document the ways that architecture might reflect shifts between neighborhoods.

Personal Definitions of Success

Student perspectives varied when they described what made their Sustained Investigations personally satisfying. Their ideas about success addressed notions of technical proficiency as well as personal meaning.

Technically strong work. Valery's comments reflected that she was satisfied when she had effectively captured visual contrast in her photos, when she knew the work was technically proficient, and when her peers gave her positive and encouraging feedback. In other words, she aspired to create visually strong work that people around her, and readers, would appreciate and value as well. All three students described this goal of creating work with technical merit, although some foregrounded this priority more than others.

Reflecting one's own vision. Sofia also wanted her work to be visually and technically strong, but she described this interest mostly as it reflected her own vision and personality. "Color definitely made me feel inspired," she recalled, and she explained that the photos with the most vibrant colors are ones that she gravitated towards when assembling her portfolio, because "I wanted it to be something that represented me and how I did my art, and how I viewed the world." She added that she included photos of brownstones because they are her favorite type of building; her selection of subject matter was meant to let her viewer in on who she is as a person and an artist. She added that she wanted to be able to be proud of the work that she produced but that ultimate this feeling of pride and success had to be connected to her own enjoyment of the process. She admitted to wanting to impress her peers but thought of this as a secondary concern—mostly, she said, "I just wanted it to be good enough for me, and for sending it in."

Emotionally expressive work. Gabriela had a similarly personal interpretation of success in the Sustained Investigation, but her notions of success had more to do with the

emotional content of her work than with its technical merits; she was the only student to orient herself to her work through this lens this overtly. “I wanted it to be heartfelt,” she explained, “around youth and a part of my life that I won’t experience again.” She added:

> What makes it successful is the emotional value, because I care more about the process... and the thoughts, less about its presentation and composition and things like that. So I just wanted to take an idea that people could somewhat understand, and just take a little walk in my shoes.

Like Sofia, then, Gabriela wanted to see herself clearly represented in her work, but her goals also extended to a desire to capture the spirit or feeling of being a young woman in this particular urban environment at this particular moment in time, and to create an emotionally-resonant representation of this feeling.

Figure 3

Student Art: Gabriela

Personally relevant work. Although Gabriela’s “heartfelt” work may seem the most personal, all three students described ways that their work held personal significance, and how this contributed to its meaning to them as creators. It became clear that they viewed this personal stake in one’s ideas as a necessary condition for creating a successful Sustained Investigation.

Valery's focus on architecture began to fully take shape when she considered her travel photography as a point of departure; in doing so, she connected a general theme more deeply to personal experience. Similarly, Sofia's choice of windows as a focus was not arbitrary: she shared that she planned to study interior design in college, and that she had a natural inclination to respond to the visual details of a space. Most of her photographs were taken in the spaces that she traversed daily, too, and she was motivated by the prospect of showing others what she noticed in these neighborhoods: "I think the [photos] with character show the area that you're from," she explained, "and it shows who you are as a person."

Gabriela described that "everything down to the papers I used, and the receipts that I saved," became material for her 'zine; the work grew out of her own daily life. As personal as it became, though, Gabriela realized that she wanted it to represent peers beyond herself as well. This broader resonance also served to make the work personally meaningful and motivating, as she felt a duty to represent her peers and community accurately:

> At first, I made the 'zine for myself, just as a reminder of everything that I've had in the past, so that when I do grow up, I have this symbolism of my years. But when I was working on it, I wanted it to portray just youth in general, and what it's like growing up here in [name of city], just because the urban experience is so much different from a suburban one, and I just wanted to show that...so that people could see the difference between people that are actually in the city..

Defining Process and Practice

All of the students from this school described becoming clearer on what inspired and motivated them as artists, and noticing their own individual sensibilities and processes. For example, Valery realized that as a photographer, she was interested in architecture, but her work was just as much about visual contrast, or "stark differences," as it was about architectural

subject matter, and eventually she began looking specifically for those contrasts as a defining element of her work.

Rather than describing the evolution of her Sustained Investigation in terms of subject matter, as Valery did, Sofia described a changing relationship to the process of making her work, in addition to a growth in the technical strength of the photos themselves. She described early phases of getting "blocked" and discouraged, but said that she learned to be persistent in continuing to build her portfolio:

> I would just get discouraged then I wouldn't want to go out and take pictures... I felt like a lot of my pictures looked the same, so that wasn't helping. But then I would find a good spot with something that really just added to the picture and then... the block would go away. I guess I got more serious as I started seeing how important it was. Yeah, I'd say that my determination throughout the process increased.

Sofia said that in reviewing all her work in order to select images for her final portfolio, "I saw how much better I got. My eye got better at looking at spaces and buildings and windows."

Gabriela also described a process of occasionally feeling stuck; "every few pages," she said, "I would stop for weeks." She developed a few personal techniques to jump-start her work. First, she said she would begin with "a day of shooting" with a basic idea in mind, that might be encapsulated by a single word or phrase, like "good company." Then she would gather her photographs and collage materials and work more or less intuitively to build a two-page spread:

> It just started with piecing together things, seeing what looked best... I would just sit down, lay all the pictures out, have tons of collage papers, and then just start. Just like, "Oh, I like this collage paper. Maybe I could cut out this person and put them here, and then do this, this, and that."

She also described using writing as a tool, creating "thought webs" as a way to organize and explore her ideas. Writing was a part of the 'zine itself, and Gabriela described the visual and language-based material evolving next to one another, with one continuously informing the other. She remembered processes of purposefully using visual language as well: "there has to be

some sort of rhythm," she said, "like if you sew through the picture or if you color on it or just draw over it"—meaning that if she employed one of these techniques in one area, she knew she wanted to find ways to repeat it periodically.

Influence of Audiences

In describing the process of developing a Sustained Investigation, students naturally acknowledged two audiences outside of themselves for their work: AP readers and their own AP teacher, who had also served as a reader and therefore had heightened credibility in their understanding of what the College Board wanted to see from them. Their descriptions of process alluded to perceived expectations of these audiences—either implicit or explicit—and the ways that these perceptions affected their choice-making in developing their portfolios.

Reader influence. All three students expressed a specific desire, and a certain pressure, for their portfolios to score well. They familiarized themselves with student sample portfolios on the College Board's website for the AP Studio Art course—Sofia recalled being taught how to search for these samples and that she was particularly interested in browsing the themes and ideas that other students had worked with. She remembered that "I felt a pressure, like, 'wow, I have to really do well to get a high score.'" Valery had similar concerns, reflected in her check-ins with her fellow students, where she shared her photos and asked, "does this look AP ready?"

Different students reflected on the positive and negative influence of the prospect of outside evaluation of their work. Valery reasoned that maybe she would not have worked so hard if her work had been created just for herself or for a class. Sofia, on the other hand, felt that she might have approached her work differently, and "maybe I would have had a little more fun with it," had she not felt the pressure to produce high-level work. Sofia also considered that she might have focused on a completely different idea if her work were not being seen by outsiders; as she

completed her portfolio she said she remembered worrying, “what if it’s boring and not original?”

Gabriela also picked up on this notion that her own interests and the expectations of readers might not align. Her solution was to create work that was highly personal, but to focus on the potential of the written statement to frame her work in the terms that she believed were most concerned with. She remembered altering an earlier written statement in order to customize it for AP submission; she said the purpose of these changes was to “make it work so it [discussed] more elements of design and less about emotional value.” Sofia’s impression of the intended focus of the written statement was somewhat different. She recalled that the advice Laura gave students was to “talk about why you chose the topic. Tell them something that you really want them to know about the topic, so that they really grasp the idea.”

Teacher influence. Laura’s students described her as a helpful sounding board at all stages of the Sustained Investigation process: as students were generating ideas, as they were shooting photos and deciding on next steps, and as they selected final pieces to form their official Sustained Investigation body of work. The nature of her guidance shifted throughout. Sometimes her role was to provide gentle encouragement—Gabriela recalled that as she was starting her work and was not yet sure of its direction, that Laura told her “I know you’ll definitely come up with an idea, you have all these ideas.” Sometimes her help was more directed: while Sofia was similarly searching for ideas, she described a process of bringing a list to Laura, who helped her to strengthen and refine her initial thoughts so that they might form the basis of a solid Sustained Investigation.

When the work was underway, all three students recalled getting consistent feedback on the use of the elements of art and principles of design in their work, and they understood

effective composition to be essential to their success in the Sustained Investigation. Sofia remarked that it almost became a joke after a while: “she would definitely mention line and rhythm a lot.” Gabriela echoed this, noting that she could rely on her teacher for compositional guidance. “I found it very helpful, because it helped direct a path for me,” focusing her attention on the technical aspects of her work that she could strengthen. She said that focusing on these areas became “more a matter of just checking myself and my work so that it falls under the right criteria.”

The students also described Laura’s encouragement in finding their own individual perspectives on their ideas, and in thinking as broadly as possible about how they might execute those ideas—to “give it character,” according to Sofia. Sofia also described Laura’s reasoning that not only would this make the work more personally absorbing, but could make it more visually interesting to outside readers as well:

> She said that we could be doing the same thing as a lot of other people because we might think it’s different, but it’s not really, and it’s something that they’ve seen a lot. So she said really try and look for something that connects with you, but you also think will do really well for the AP Art scoring. But mostly that you really liked it, and you had a good time doing the concentration.

In these conversations, students described Laura’s process of not overriding ideas, but rather of amplifying and refining the strongest aspects of them, pushing her students to bring more focus and clarity (or alternately, to think more expansively) about their work and ideas.

What Makes a Good Sustained Investigation

As they reflected on their own Sustained Investigation processes and considered advice that they would give to others about what characterizes an especially strong body of work, all three participants touched in different ways on the importance of flexibility in the process of

making art. They also unanimously felt that it could be dangerous to obsess over finding a "perfect" idea or sticking to the first idea that came to mind.

Valery had described the need to let your ideas change over time; she reasoned that if you stayed with an initial idea even after you had lost interest, it would "feel like work." She recognized that alternate ideas—perhaps better ones—could occur after the work was started. Sofia echoed that the work of the Sustained Investigation should be as fun for the artist as possible, and similarly expressed that students should think broadly about the possibilities for their central ideas: "Be open to any type of theme," she advised, because if you limit yourself to your first idea, "you might not find what you're looking for in that theme, and you might not feel proud of that theme when it's done."

Gabriela explained that "I think what makes a good idea is the meat of it. What can you make from that idea, or what is there to bounce off of that idea?" The meatiness of the idea, then, has to do with whether it offers the potential to sustain an entire body of work. She reasoned that even simple ideas could have this "meaty" quality, though, and that the persistence of the artist is what gives the idea its mileage: "if there's a drive that you have, in regards to working on a theme, even if it may not seem like the best idea, you're going to always work it out in a way... so that it has purpose."

These two threads of advice are an interesting juxtaposition: ideas should be "meaty" and well-defined, but they should also be fluid enough to evolve over time, and to not be constrained by the limits of an initial vision or plan. These changes, in other words, are not a matter of being wishy-washy, but of adapting and responding to one's own experience of making the work.

Parochial School: Teacher

At the time of our conversation, Laura had taught the AP Studio Art course for six years and had intermittently served as a reader, for a total of three times. Over the years, she had developed a highly structured course, guided by the use of photography as a medium and weekly assignments to keep their work on schedule. There was not a sense of real rigidity in anyone's description of the course, though, and this may be because Laura also sees herself primarily as a counselor or collaborator, regularly connecting with students and getting to know their work, ideas, and concerns personally.

She described these guardrails of the course's design as methods of keeping the process manageable for students, helping to ensure their successful completion of a portfolio while hopefully not hindering the potential or personal relevance of students' own ideas and goals.

Defining the Sustained Investigation

Laura touched on a number of ideas when describing the core qualities of the Sustained Investigation. She noted that first and foremost, it is work united by a theme, but she also stressed that exploration and the building of student voice was vital to the process as well. She also described what to avoid—specifically cliched imagery or ideas—as a way of highlighting its opposite as a marker of strength.

Exploration of a theme. Laura explained that at the start of the year, she described the Sustained Investigation for her new AP students in straightforward terms. First, she said that she let them know that it is "a unique opportunity... to work around a theme in the medium of their choice." When describing this idea of working within a theme, she said she also emphasized that

it must be one that will keep students personally invested; she told students that they must pick something that interested them deeply and that they could stick with over time:

> I talk about the fact that they need to pick a theme that has some room for investigation. You can't pick something that you're going to tire of, it doesn't have enough room for exploration, or is frankly just overly generic. Most of my students have grown up in [city], they're sophisticated, and so they often come up with good Concentration topics.

When addressing the "room for investigation," with students, she shared other aspects of process that would become important to this body of work, recalling that "risk-taking [is] a really important part of it, and experimentation, [and] student voice."

Avoiding clichés. Students' understandings of what makes a successful Sustained Investigation were also shaped by their understanding of its opposite: what to avoid when selecting ideas or themes. Laura explained that she drew on her experiences as a reader to highlight subject matter that she saw frequently, and to suggest that students stay away from it: "I try to set the stage a little bit," she explained, "with talking about the readers don't want to see anything about eyeballs or young women's body images." She acknowledged that this framing could be delicate in order to keep students engaged—"I never want to quash a good idea"—but said that she was honest with students about very common Sustained Investigation topics. She explained, "I always just say, it's been done a million times before and there's not a lot of room there, necessarily." Certain techniques, as well as topics, were considered unoriginal: Laura firmly advised against building a portfolio of anime-style drawing, for example, because "I just always worry that we're going to end up with something that's really stylistically similar to what's already out there."

Structures for Teaching the Sustained Investigation

After establishing the hallmarks of a Sustained Investigation more generally, Laura elaborated on the structures that she put into place that further define how *her students*, in

particular, experience and produce a Sustained Investigation, and how they will understand when their ideas have been carried out successfully. Laura's students had varying levels of art experience, and she described a number of scaffolds that she put into place make the process manageable for students. First, she established a general recommendation that students use photography as a medium in the building of their portfolios. In order to facilitate their understanding of working within a theme, she shared examples of bodies of work by contemporary artists. She also relied heavily on the elements of art and principles of design as anchors for guiding student work. Finally, she provided ongoing feedback to students, helping them to define and strengthen their ideas, but also keeping them mindful of the reader's perspective in evaluating student work.

Photography as a medium. In recent years, Laura has strongly encouraged all of her AP students to work with photography as a primary medium in their Sustained Investigations. If students had strong preferences to make other forms of work, she allowed it, but shared that she felt that photography as a medium helps to ensure that students can produce the large volume of work required within a single year. She reflected that her past experiences with teaching the course in a more open-ended way taught her that students can get easily "overwhelmed" with the amount of choices before them; if they are not interested in photography, she might next encourage them to consider collage or mixed media as alternate processes.

To keep students on a schedule of creative production, she also led the class on periodic "photo walks" around the neighborhoods close to the school, to help them seek out new approaches to their ideas. Outside of these photo walks, students were to continue taking additional photographs as weekly homework assignments. She stressed the importance of

“interacting with a community” to the process of photography, expressing that “photography can be so rich if you're actually interacting with your subjects.”

A focus on the elements and principles. Laura explained that she often used the elements of art and principles of design as anchors of her facilitation of the Sustained Investigation experience. On a photo walk, she might encourage students to especially consider their use of line in their images. Similarly, when offering feedback on students’ homework, she often led with comments on these formal aspects of the work. She explained that this focus helped to balance students’ natural inclination to approach their work in terms of their involvement with particular subject matter or themes above any other considerations:

> I often give a lens for every week’s worth of photo assignments. I’ll say this week, you’re going to take photos about the empowerment of black women [referencing one student’s Sustained Investigation topic], but you’re going to be thinking about the element of line. And then the next week you might be thinking about the element of pattern or you might be thinking about the element of texture or... So I give them a lens because sometimes when I just say, “Okay I need you to go take ten photos about the empowerment of black women,” they don’t know where to start.

Artist examples. To help students understand what it means to create a body of work around a theme or idea, Laura also shared examples of professional artists’ work with her students. When selecting these examples, she explained that “I do try to show largely artists of color because I just want my students to have examples that they can relate to.” They recently visited a Kerry James Marshall exhibit, and she said that she routinely shows them work by Kehinde Wiley, because “I think his work is really rich in terms of working across a theme in a very unique way.” She shared plans for students in the upcoming school year to extend this work by doing artist research of their own. She reasoned that if each student identified a small collection of artists whose work was particularly interesting to them, they might become more deeply engaged in discussing and sharing these artistic examples with one another.

Laura is a practicing artist herself, and mentioned that she has sometimes shared her own work with students, especially work that she completed for classes. “I had this one professor,” she explained, “who had us first start with drawing 30 objects that are of interest to us with ink.” She said that she would lay out the 30 drawings, and then have students describe themes or ideas that they saw emerging throughout.

Student support and feedback. Laura explained that she saw much of her influence on students’ Sustained Investigations as something that happened in ongoing one-on-one conversations. “I just see my role as almost like a counselor,” she described. As she explained, this coaching happened through general encouragement, but also vetting ideas and helping students think through their own processes. She also deliberately sought to bring the voice of the reader to her students, to keep them mindful of the criteria by which their work would eventually be evaluated.

Vetting ideas. Laura described a process of having her students write lists of at least three Sustained Investigation ideas at the beginning of the year. She collected and reviewed these, and then held individual conferences with students to discuss these ideas and offer her recommendations. She reflected that in many cases, students did not need further feedback and coaching on the concepts themselves; rather, they needed help thinking through the logistics of how they might approach these ideas through photography or other media. “Most students had one idea that was really fantastic, but might be a little bit of a pie-in-the-sky kind of idea,” she explained, meaning that they could not yet envision how they would concretely and manageably explore that idea visually:

> I had a girl this year come up with this idea to do diseases, but she wanted to recreate like cellular representations of diseases through photography. So I thought, “wow. Fantastic. That sounds amazing.” But then I try to be realistic with them too because I

> don't want it to fail, so I said, "How are you going to do this? Talk me through it. What are you thinking?" And then she was sort of like, "Well, I don't know."

In this case, Laura recommended a few concrete strategies: the student could talk to the biology teacher, who she knew would be receptive to the idea. She suggested that maybe there was a way to experiment with photographing through the lenses of the school's microscopes, as a starting place. Other students might need to examine entirely different sets of challenges. For example, Laura described that another student wanted to make her work about "the evolution of her family... as she begins to separate from them." This student was barely on speaking terms with her parents, however, as a result of a recent argument, and Laura gently suggested that this tension might make the work exceptionally difficult. In both this case and the case of the student interested in diseases, she noted that her initial feedback mostly revolves around envisioning with them the first photographs that they might take, and dealing with the uncertainties there. "Sometimes," she said, "I'll say, it's Saturday morning and you've gotta take these ten [weekly] photos about this theme. So what does that look like?"

In some cases, this individual coaching had to confront the fact that the student was not yet settled on an idea. Laura recalled one student who knew that she generally wanted to work with contrasts of light and shadow:

> I said, "Would you please go over to the church," 'cause we have a church attached to our school, "and just go in and see what kind of photos you could get related to light or, potentially, shadow." So she listened to me, but she went into the priest's area, [chuckle] into where they keep their garments and their vestments. It's all fine, they're allowed back there. But she started to take photos of the garments and the vestments and they were okay, but they could have been better. But I was like, "Oh, my God. This could be an amazing topic." And as we both know, there are just aren't that many examples of that... If we had more time, yes, I would have had her do maybe religious objects and maybe even thinking about Catholicism in the twenty-first century or something.

Laura described the challenges to this process of guiding her students. She explained that in recommending defined parameters for her students to work within, like building their portfolios

from photo walks in the neighborhood "I try to create strategies for success, but in creating those strategies for success, sometimes they could be in opposition to growth, in a way." In describing the structures or recommendations, it became clear that in addition to the more general ones that applied to all students (like the photo walks), her feedback to individual students was very much about amplifying their existing strengths and interests: she wanted them to recognize the value in their ideas as they are being formed, as in the case of the student photographing behind the scenes at the church. She also wanted them to see their own artistic inclinations, and to take full advantage of their natural tendencies as artists. She recalled that several years ago,

> I had a girl where, she wanted to focus on textures, like different man-made objects and textures in the city. But when I looked through her photos I was like, "look, you've got just a beautiful sense of color in the urban environment." So I steered her more in that direction.

She acknowledged that sometimes these new directions do not work out, and underscored that it is always an option for students to say, in her words, "you know what, I can't do this. It's just not working for me." Laura acknowledged this ongoing engagement as a challenge: "if they don't enjoy English [class]," she said, "they're just like 'oh well, I don't enjoy it,'" but they persevere. In contrast, she observed that in art class, students expect to enjoy their work all the time, "so then when they're hitting a wall, they're not quite sure what to make of it." Laura's "strategies for success" were ultimately about helping students to get started in their work and to cope with hitting the wall by offering concrete next steps or entry points to their ideas.

Representing the reader. Having trained and served as a reader in recent years, Laura brought that perspective to her conversations with students. Throughout the year, she explained that she seeks to orient students toward College Board expectations for their portfolios, and she expects that they will merge these goals with their own interests as artists. Sometimes this is a delicate balance. In ongoing conversations with her students, she explained, "I don't show them

the rubric, but I say [readers are] looking for experimentation and risk-taking, they're looking for student voice." The awareness of these criteria influences her feedback to students on their ideas. She recalled a student several years ago who had a vague idea about photographing bodies covered in splattered paint—"I know it's not a rich topic," she commented. "Or, it could be but... it's much harder." Her specific concerns had to do with outside audiences. First, her school environment is conservative, and she explained that her principal reviewed every portfolio. But in addition to that, Laura was nervous about the alignment of this approach with AP expectations. She expressed that in retrospect, she thinks she should have "just call[ed] the mother and [said], 'this is what the rubric is, and there's just not enough room for growth and development.'"

Although students did not review the rubrics, they did familiarize themselves with the structure the five-point scale of AP scoring. Laura had students review sample Sustained Investigations on the College Board's website, and she prepared questions for students to answer about the work and the visual evidence of idea and investigation. In addition, she had students guess the portfolio's score, before a class discussion of why the work earned the score that it did. She explained that the purpose of bringing an awareness of the scoring process was not meant to intimidate her students; rather, it served as a motivator:

> I think for my students, AP means a lot. They are trying to make their best work for AP. I think they do think about it differently because of the, I guess the guidelines of AP, but also the status of AP.

The Purpose of the Sustained Investigation

When Laura spoke about her broader hopes or purposes in structuring the AP Studio Art course—the bigger understandings that she hoped students would walk away with—she returned to the practice of developing one's own individual voice as an artist, and the ability to envision

one's self within a community of artists. She especially wanted students to draw connections between their own work and the work of contemporary artists. Whether visiting exhibits, sharing artist videos in class, having students read art publications, or asking them to do their own research on artists, Laura was always looking for opportunities to inform and inspire their work. She wanted her students to gain an understanding of the nature of artistic process and practice, and to develop their own points of view. She described her own practice as an artist, which involved individual as well as collectively produced work, and described this work as often responding to a stimulus or to the work of other artists. It seemed that she wanted students to see themselves as a part of this greater conversation too. In addressing her own art, she acknowledged that her practice sometimes aligns with the parameters that she sets for her students and sometimes does not:

> When I think about my own work, I'm currently working on a series of collages that might turn into paintings about women in the Met, and I'm taking different images of women...that are in the Met and then just putting them into these alternate universes, but all of the alternate universes are composed of imagery from the Met. That might be something I would share with the students... but I guess when I'm doing my own work, I'm not necessarily focused on the elements and principles of design. I do believe the elements and principles are there in my own work. I'm just not like, "Okay, this week is about line."

Chapter Summary

Students at this school site mostly described their ideas in terms of subject matter, but also referenced elements of process, like assembling mixed-media collage, as central components to the idea, or expressions of the idea. Several also stressed that their ideas had not been static, but had grown and evolved, or changed completely, over time. When describing what qualities made their Sustained Investigations particularly successful, they described an interest in producing technically strong work that reflected their own individual points of view—

work that was not only well-executed but told the viewer something about them. In describing both their idea of success and their own processes of producing their work, students stressed that it was important that their central ideas were personally interesting, and that it was emotionally expressive, telling something about what it was about the subject matter or theme that interested them.

Students here were keenly aware of two audiences for their work but held differing views on the role of each. The influence of readers was felt as a pressure to produce quality work that would earn high scores, a goal that students openly admitted to caring about. Their teacher was another outside audience, but a closer one that functioned more as a source of support than of judgment.

When identifying the qualities of a good Sustained Investigation, students spoke about two related hallmarks: ideas should be clear and well-defined, but they should also be flexible enough to change if that will strengthen the portfolio.

Their teacher, Laura, defined the Sustained Investigation as work that revolves around a central theme, but also indicated that some themes are stronger or more original than others when describing her counseling of students to avoid clichés in their work. She employed a number of structures in facilitating students' experience of the Sustained Investigation, with a stated goal of making the process manageable. First, she encouraged them to work with photography as a medium. In structuring weekly assignments and offering student feedback, she anchored her ideas in the use of the elements and principles. She shared a range of contemporary artists' work with her students, to strengthen their understanding of methods of creating a related body of work. In working with students on an individual basis, she focused primarily on helping to define and strengthen their ideas, and to be the voice of the reader in helping students to understand

how their work would be evaluated. Ultimately, Laura described the value and purpose of the Sustained Investigation as enabling students to find their voices as artists, to work as a part of a community of artists, and to understand the role of process in developing a body of work.

Chapter VI

FINDINGS: ARTS MAGNET SCHOOL

The arts-focused high school profiled here is a public magnet program in a city in the Mountain region of the United States. The school serves students in grades 6-12, who are admitted through an audition system. Over one thousand students attend, declaring personal majors, which may include visual arts, band, and orchestra, but also stagecraft, creative writing, video arts, and several others. Many students commute from considerable distances each day to attend. Everything about the school's presence suggests a seriousness of creative study here: their website features an extensive list of students of every art form who have won regional or national awards. The school prides itself on not only offering them a rigorous arts education, but a rigorous education in general, and the school is routinely ranked among the top high schools in regional and state lists. Distance and scheduling prevented me from visiting this site in person, but the school's online presence, as well as conversations with the AP Studio Art teacher and his students reinforce a clear message: these students are artists, and big things happen here. A lot is expected of them, and they expect a lot of themselves.

Mitch, the AP teacher, had just completed his first year teaching at this school. It was also the school's first year requiring all senior visual art majors to submit AP portfolios, although prior students had been required to create very similar collections in the work in the past—just without the component of external assessment. Even so, it was something of a surprise to students that they would be preparing portfolios—Olivia, one of the students profiled here, recalled that on their first day of class, "he sort of said, 'this year is AP.'" Given the ambitious nature of students here, it did not take them long to make big plans.

Portrait: Olivia

I met Olivia with the background knowledge that she was something of a superstar artist. In speaking with her teacher, I learned her work had been shortlisted for the annual College Board exhibit of AP Studio Art student work. The show typically features about 30 works of art, selected from upwards of 60,000 portfolios. Exhibited at selected venues nationwide as well as online, the work is meant to inspire future AP students, and give them a sense of the tremendous range of expressive possibilities that are open to them. Her work—a series of soft sculptures exploring the idea of home—was clean, precise, and thoughtful. Her presentation of her self is similar: polished, professional, and articulate. After we spoke, she sent me a link to her personal website, documenting an impressively photographed and cleanly organized range of her artwork produced in the last four years, including a special section highlighting her AP work and statement. As she discussed her work, her tone had an even, almost serene delivery, and her words were as considered as her art.

Reflecting on her introduction to the Sustained Investigation in particular, Olivia recalled that her teacher "explained that in the twelve pieces we would have sort of one concept that we would explore throughout the year." She said that Mitch also shared several sample portfolios and then had them get to work in identifying ideas for their own work, right at the start of the year. "We had to come up with a bunch of different ideas," she said, and "talked about which ones were stronger, which ones we could actually... explore for a full year." In outlining her ideas for the Sustained Investigation, Olivia began by thinking about what she is good at, and the kind of work and processes that she gravitates towards. She thought about topics that interested her, and also about ways that she might want to challenge herself in her Sustained Investigation.

These early ideas were loose, vacillating between 2D and 3D options, but they were easy to identify. She knew what her interests were, and the kinds of work that would motivate her: her early thoughts had to do with working in either watercolor or fabric, "'cause those are my two favorite media to work in." She also knew from the outset that she wanted to do something relating to "landscapes or cities." Even though these early ideas were not fully formed, she explained that she knew there were viable pieces there because these interests were interesting not only to her, but to her teacher:

> I don't even know if he really ruled out any ideas for me. Even though I had to make a list, I already sort of knew what I wanted to do. I think that especially 'cause my portfolio is very abstract, I think that maybe that for him was really interesting as a teacher, rather than just illustrating images of landscapes, although I could have done something interesting with that too. But for him, I think that he really encouraged us to do something that we were interested in. And from there would work with us on that idea and just make sure that it was engaging.

These emerging ideas were almost puzzle pieces of elements that Olivia knew would be important to her: the beginning of an idea of subject matter, early thoughts on the ways that that subject matter might offer deeper conceptual avenues to explore, some defined preferences of materials and processes to work with, and an personal intention to do something challenging. She trusted these interests to guide her in defining her work further and searched for ways to make them fit together. In the end, Olivia created a body of soft sculptures around the idea of *home*, and felt that this combination of media and idea could easily sustain her for the full year. It was a project that retained pieces of all of the interests and priorities that she had defined for herself.

> I've always been very interested in buildings and just really aesthetically drawn to, not only buildings, but again landscape, and I just am in love with the mountains and the plains and all these places that I have so many memories of from my childhood, and sort of this idea of comfort with a place. And I think that that was something that tied a lot of emotion in, as well as an interest in certain aesthetics that I wanted to explore. I think that was the main thing, and again, it was just something that I kept coming back to and returning to this idea of landscape and also buildings, and I think that in sort of the nostalgia aspect is when it sort of became my full idea.

Even though Olivia felt that she had known what she wanted to do from the outset, she shared that in retrospect, she thought that home might not be the most accurate word to describe the central idea of her Sustained Investigation. “Looking back on it,” she said, “I think it had more to do with nostalgia. I was using home as synonymous to nostalgia... specifically relating to sort of physical space and landscape.”

She said that from the beginning, she knew that she wanted to build sculptures from fabric, and that she wanted them to be abstract. The sculptures were going to be large-scale, but she also wanted them to be wearable. “That was my intention,” she said, “to have pieces that people could interact with. And I would interact with space, too.” She had worked with fabric in the past, but this undertaking was different, and the challenge was the point:

> [M]ost of the work I’ve done this past year, I have not done anything like it before. So I decided on that just ‘cause I knew it would be challenging and forced me to really think the whole year. That was my why.

The challenge specifically was “making things that I could very clearly see in my mind but I had no idea how to actually make real in front of me,” she said. Simply knowing what she was aiming for did not necessarily mean that she knew how to get there. Her second sculpture of the year was like this: a work that she could envision clearly but struggled to bring into existence in the way that she wanted. She described the work:

> It’s this big white sort of pillowy house. And I remember very, very distinctly seeing in my mind this image of this house that was white and really just looked very sort of cloud-like and pillowy, but at the same time was very sort of solid in a way and I also could see someone sort of sitting inside of it, really cramped... with their arms and legs sort of coming out of it.

The challenge here was in building a three-dimensional house shape that could stand on its own but maintain a delicate appearance. It took several rounds of trial and error to come up with a solution that matched her vision. First, she experimented with sewing a structure with walls of

fabric, held upright by a layer of stuffing, “which did not work at all in any way.” She considered other materials to hold the house upright—foam, rice, different kinds of stuffing—before realizing that foam core could form the center of the walls. She realized that she needed to deal with each layer separately: foam core, fabric, stuffing, and then a separate white fabric cover that slid over the entire structure.

Figure 4

Student Art: Olivia

Having figured out this balance between structure and softness, she carried a similar aesthetic and themes into another piece that was wearable in a different way:

> My third, or maybe this was my fourth piece, was this jacket that almost looked very restrictive, like a strait jacket, but that I had this really pillowy texture on the outside, and then all of these windows sort of to the person inside but [the jacket] completely covered their head and their arms and you couldn’t recognize them, except for these little pieces of them.

Olivia described these works as two of her most successful pieces. She said they were her personal favorites because she had, in her words "very distinct images of...what I wanted them to look like, and they just felt very concrete, and when I was done, they felt finished."

Olivia shared photos of these sculptures: the first is a simplified house form, maybe three feet in height. Indeed, a person has squeezed inside, with his or her arms outstretched, extending to the ground from the windows placed on each side like armholes. In the second example, a person wears the puffy straitjacket top, which looks like almost like a turtleneck with the collar pulled straight up, over the wearer's face. Tiny squares and rectangles, maybe two or three inches tall, have been cut out of the piece, framing an eye, the corner of the mouth, a swatch of torso. The works were thoughtful, poignant, and a little bit comical. They were so striking in their content, their construction, and in their visual presentation, that it was unsurprising that they were selected to represent the AP course nationally.

Olivia explained that not all of her pieces were so successful, or so satisfying, and that her ideas "got messier" as the year went on. There was one work in particular that she spent more time on than the others, but that somehow never fully came together. She said it was "the one I probably did the most experimenting with over the long term," and that the experimentation was not only focused on understanding her materials but about "trying to figure out what I was going for and what I was really trying to make." In contrast to the earlier sculptures, it was not simply a matter of making a piece that matched a picture in her mind, because:

> My idea was just changing a lot, like really a lot throughout the whole process, and... I got to the end and still really didn't know what I was doing, or where I felt like I needed more time, and I wanted to pull in all these different elements that I didn't have in the rest of my portfolio to experiment with.

Pulling in these “other elements” worried her, because the work might not be visually cohesive with the rest of her sculptures. She said this sculpture left her feeling “emotionally exhausted... I never really felt like I got to a place where I really liked it.”

Although the work could be draining, Olivia thought purposefully about the emotional content of her work, and emotional themes became a part of her planning process between pieces. She explained, “I would write down the different emotions that I felt each piece was exploring, and then I would try to think of a new one for my next piece.” She would use these words as anchors for each new work, to set her goals in exploring “a new relationship, or new landscape, or a new emotion.”

In addition to relying on her own perspectives of her work in progress, Olivia of course had her teacher as a consistent sounding board for her ideas, and some of his suggestions became foundational aspects of her Sustained Investigation. In the example of the house sculpture, Olivia explained that it was Mitch’s suggestion for it to be wearable.

> I remember I came in and I put it around my neck one day. He said, “You make that into a wearable piece.” And it was just sort of those little suggestions that moved us further along in our Concentration and made it a bit more interesting or complex. And I feel like that was sort of the main thing that he was doing as our teacher, was just pushing it a little bit further, or sort of asking us questions to engage us more in our own work.

At the same time, Olivia acknowledged that she did not need much of a push, and that his primary role in the development of her work was as a support system and a source of encouragement. “I was already spending a lot of time agonizing over new ideas and trying to push myself on my own,” she said, “and as long as I showed that to him he just would say, ‘Keep doing that.’”

At other points, Olivia recalled that Mitch did artist research to help students think about their own ideas in a broader context; for example, he showed Olivia the fabric sculptures of Do

Ho Suh for comparison and contrast to her own work. He also held formal and informal critiques of student work, and students learned to recognize certain words that he used to signal the hallmarks of successful work:

> One word that he used all throughout the year was *evocative*... He would use that word all the time. It was a really good thing if he called your portfolio evocative. I think [it means] just something that was very unique, in a way, or exploring a different idea, or made you think, both as an artist or as a viewer. So, immediate.

In addition to making evocative work, Mitch wanted students to be able to present their most successful work, in terms of technique. To Olivia's ear, this seemed to be encouragement to play it a bit safe—to do something that you were sure you could pull off, because you had done it before. This approach was somewhat at odds with her own interest in doing something new and challenging; she recalled that she often heard the advice to, in her words "do something that you know you're good at," but that she wanted to maintain her own goal, which was to "make sure you're doing something that is really interesting, and that challenges you, and that you'll have to...think about [in] new ways."

Although her work was shaped by a defined plan—she knew from the beginning what her preferences were in terms of materials and overall concept—Olivia reflected that the work turned out to be much different than she originally anticipated. "I wanted all of my work to be very colorful," she remembered, "and I wanted it to be very textured, and that's literally the exact opposite [of what happened]." To Olivia, these shifts did not represent a more straightforward change of plans; they were evidence of certain sensibilities and preferences that just seemed to be a part of her artistic DNA, and these tendencies asserted themselves again and again, even if she planned differently. She observed that "what I'm able to do as an artist, and what I look for in other art, are two very different things." There might be a certain freedom or power in this,

recognizing your own voice and sensibility emerging. To Olivia, though, this realization was also a source of frustration:

> I feel like I knew that these are my strengths, but I guess a part of me really, really wanted to think otherwise. I've always known that one of my strengths was craftsmanship and focusing on being really nitpicky about how things look, and they have to be very, very clean and structured, and that's definitely something that I think was reflected in this portfolio. Also picking to do basically all my work in white—my need for everything to just be very, almost sterile in a way. And then I also realized that I am very drawn to repetitive motions. I spent a lot of time making all these tiny little clay houses, where basically all I would do is I would roll out a sheet of clay, and then cut them into blocks and then shape each house, and then I would go back and reshape each house to make sure that they looked as perfect as possible. And again, this need for everything to be perfect is something that I feel like I'm not all drawn to when I look at other people's art, but I feel like for myself, as an artist, it's just something that I can't—I really struggle to get away from. And that became just blatantly clear during this portfolio.

In addition to drawing a distinction between her own work and the work of others, and the qualities she responds to in each, Olivia observed that there are pronounced differences in the ways that she approached her own work when it was being developed for an outside audience, versus when it was solely for her own enjoyment. "I see external goals very differently than internal goals," she said, and "working just for fun is a lot easier than working towards something for someone else, that other people will view." She described the personal projects as work that "comes easier" to her: she sews and quilts and watercolors on her own time, and said that these projects require "little emotional investment," in contrast to her Sustained Investigation. Olivia said this work was "all just for fun," but was clear that this did not mean they were not as meaningful as the Sustained Investigation: "they're just as important as these bigger ones that you have to think a lot about."

Olivia was very intentional about her work, and preparing the written statement to accompany her Sustained Investigation was no exception. She explained that she wrote about the

purpose of her choices of materials, and of her interest in "being able to embrace a lot of juxtaposing ideas:"

> So again, like softness and structure. And then also thinking about home and seeing something that was both very comfortable and safe, but also can be very confining in a way. And trying to approach that both through the materials, and also the actual pieces that I was making.

She also wrote about the personal meaning she derived from the work as it might contrast with an outside viewer's perspective, saying that she wanted viewers to be able to consider the idea of home more broadly, but to recognize the specific and personal nature of her own associations with the idea: "I had a very clear idea in my mind of what I was making in reaction to my own life."

Olivia was mindful of an external audience throughout the process of creating her work. Although she described the Sustained Investigation as personally meaningful—the level of meaning and personal challenge she described were core criteria for herself in undertaking the work to begin with—she also admitted that if it were not for the evaluative aspect of the portfolio, she would not have taken on this challenge at all.

> I probably wouldn't have made any of this work just on my own. Without AP, had we just done our normal senior year concentration, I think that I would have done something a lot easier and something that I already was very familiar with and knew how to do... I think that having that standard pushed me to make something that I wasn't really comfortable with. AP gave me a reason to work at the intensity that I was and with the commitment that I was, whereas yeah, with other pieces, I can walk away if I want to, or really do whatever I want, and not worrying about it being evocative or interesting. Ultimately, I didn't care that much about the score I was going to get. But I think that having this external reason to create pushed me towards internal goals, in a way.

She clarified that having the external audience pushed her to make work that made her "uncomfortable," but that she wanted to work in this way, to see what she was capable of, and the AP process gave her the incentive to do it: "I just wanted to see myself doing things that I felt uncomfortable with," she said, "and that maybe I wouldn't do again." She wanted to be original,

and to surprise herself: “I guess the main thing that I was always trying to do, which was really frustrating, was just trying to make something that I hadn’t seen before.” Her personal criteria for success, then, had little to do with the score at the end, but more to do with the willingness to try something challenging. She noticed that this philosophy was different from that of her peers, noting that some students more readily stuck to their strengths and preferences, and reasoned that this certainty of one’s outcomes might lead them to be less emotionally invested in that work, since they were perhaps not challenging themselves as much as they might have. Olivia acknowledged the difficulty in establishing an intention of pushing yourself, of doing something uncomfortable, or being emotionally invested in your work: by design, then, you will feel drained at the end of the process, but hopefully the work will have been worth it. In her case, she said it was: “I think that the main thing about constantly having to try and figure out what I was doing was difficult, and also really rewarding.”

In retrospect, Olivia was satisfied with her Sustained Investigation. Even though it felt somewhat unfinished, she had a new perspective on her work and process: maybe art functions as a vehicle for making your thoughts visible:

> Even looking at all my pieces right now, it feels almost like unfinished thoughts, in a way. I was visiting an art installation earlier this summer, and I was looking at all these artists’ pieces and it almost looked like...their art was less about creating art, and more about sort of manifesting thoughts, and of giving form to their thoughts. When I look at my work, I feel the same way, it sometimes it feels less about the art and more about sort of the process of thinking, and art sort of gives me a way to give light to a lot of thoughts or to continue thinking. I think that for me, working with my hands is one really important way of thinking through things. And being able to engage with the world around me, and I think that this portfolio is a good example of that, it’s just sort of manifesting things, sort of manifesting thoughts in a way, if that makes sense.

Arts Magnet: Students

In addition to Olivia, I spoke with two more student artists from the magnet program: Brianna, who was experimenting with mixed media and soft sculpture in her AP work, and Paige, a painter who planned to major in psychology when she started school in the fall. Their work and processes were highly varied, from two-dimensional to three dimensional, figurative to abstract, but they shared similar orientations to their work, especially in their understanding of the symbiotic relationship between media and concept, and their commitment to challenging themselves as artists.

Defining Ideas

All three students initially described their ideas in terms of concept, but they quickly identified the centrality of medium and technique to the ways that the central ideas were explored. They were also united in speaking about their ideas as emerging from personal interests or experiences.

Concept or theme as idea. Just as Olivia defined her Sustained Investigation in terms of the themes of home and nostalgia, Paige and Brianna also began their discussion of their work by describing the overall idea of what it was about. Paige described that, "my Concentration for the year ended up being the connection between art and the viewers, and the meaning of art between each one, and what role each person plays in the relationship." She explained that some pieces were about the role of the artist, and how they assign meaning to their work, while others were about ways that viewers change the meaning of works of art. Eventually she started thinking about the role art plays in society, for example, "how art is usually used to tell and sustain religion and myths, stuff like that." Brianna, similarly, described her idea in terms of an

overarching concept—feminism—but also on related themes and concepts that branched off of that: “I ended up focusing on feminism,” she said, “and my personal experiences with that, and the history of my own family with feminism and sexism and misogyny.”

Material or process as idea. These students defined their ideas primarily in terms of their conceptual content, and all three of them created work that was particularly conceptually complex. While nobody defined their Sustained Investigation chiefly as, for example, a series of paintings, or an exploration of the process of painting, it was clear that material, process, and aesthetic choices played a key role in envisioning these bodies of work, carrying them out, and ensuring their personal value to the maker. In most cases, students’ choices of material constraints played an equal role in defining the approach to a Sustained Investigation—materials may not have been *what* students were exploring, in terms of ideas, but they constituted the avenues by which they were exploring these ideas. For example, as Olivia began to define her central concept of home, she was equally anchored in knowing the materials and processes that she wanted to work with, especially making things out of fabric. Brianna knew from the early stages of her work that she wanted to focus on soft sculpture as an avenue for creative exploration, and that the materials that might fit into this category—yarn, wool roving, nylon packed with sand—might have metaphorical resonance with her conceptual content. Paige similarly decided early on that her work would be grounded in the process of painting.

The personal as source of ideas. All three students made comments about the significance of the Sustained Investigation in allowing them to explore ideas that were personally meaningful. In Olivia’s case, this surfaced as an acknowledgement of her own aesthetic strengths and preferences, and a decision to embrace sensibilities that would always emerge in her work. In addition, the notion of “home” was personally resonant for a student facing her final year of

living at home before leaving for college. Paige, who made paintings about the relationship of art to its viewers, explained that she planned on majoring in psychology, "so I really like exploring the relationships between people or things or things like that...so that's how my Concentration came to be." Brianna described the ways that her work became a vehicle to reflect upon and communicate about her own experiences of trauma; the deeply personal source of this work was among the first things she described about it:

> I'm just going to go out and say this: I experienced a lot of traumatic things, involving sexual assault and misogyny and that kind of thing, as a young kid. And watching the female figures in my life fight against it, watching myself grow into someone who is ultra-feminist and womanist, and wants to promote that, it developed this passion for me. I have watched so many strong women in my life grow up to be amazing and I want to see myself do the exact same thing. There's that personal connection. I don't think people understand... what it feels like to go through experiences of being hurt as a woman, just because you are a woman.

For these students, these connections to their work were not just a way to keep themselves interested; the idea of personal relevance was central to their overall concept of the Sustained Investigation, and they commented upon it frequently. Paige remembered that early in the process, when she abandoned one idea for the theme that she eventually pursued, it was driven by the lack of personal meaning in the earlier idea. This missing piece even made her question her own identity as an artist:

> I had this breakdown and I was like, this is not important to me; why am I making this art? It doesn't even make sense, am I even good at art? If I'm only doing things that aren't important... do I really have value as an artist?

Brianna shared similar thoughts, saying that "without that personal connection, I just sort of feel not passionate enough about it."

Evolution of Ideas

All students acknowledged that their ideas for their Sustained Investigations did not arrive fully formed. Olivia talked about an initial inclination to work with landscapes and structures, but it took some planning to more fully articulate the idea of home as a unifying idea. Paige and Brianna also shared experiences of making early work that served to crystallize their ideas. In Paige's case, she began pursuing an idea that she quickly abandoned in favor of her paintings on art-artist-viewer relationships. Initially, she explained, she was going to envision "fairytale[s] in a modern context," juxtaposing classic characters in modern situations. She made it halfway through one piece and noticed that it made her miserable. She said she remembered thinking, "this is a good idea, but it's not something that I want to see through." She realized that the missing feature was the element of personal resonance, or of feeling as if she was saying something "important." In frustration, she abandoned this work and spontaneously started a new painting at home, without a plan:

> I was like, "I'm just going to paint whatever I want to right now and whatever feels good to me." I ended up painting this body, turned away from the viewer and I was like, oh my God! This piece is about artist's block and the pressure to create for so many artists, where you're like, you have to just keep on creating something new and intelligent and stuff like that all the time and it's really emotionally draining. So then I brought in that piece and I was like, "so this is completely different from what I started off with."

Brianna described a similar process of working somewhat intuitively at the outset. Like Paige, she also described using the personal relevance of the work as a compass, realizing that the more personal a piece was, the more successful it was. "Starting off was extremely hard," she recalled. "It just kinda took my own playing around with different mediums and ideas in order for me to get it." In the process of experimenting and making a few early pieces, she realized that her initial focus on "feminism and womanism" was too broad. Her initial plan was to represent "strong idols we should look at," including Cleopatra and Artemisia Gentileschi. As she worked,

“slowly but surely, I started to get more personal as time went on,” and this personal work was more specific, and more satisfying. She knew she was on the right track when she made a soft sculpture about the experience of sexual assault; she described her own emotional closeness to the piece as an indicator that she was on the right path:

> You know when you look at a piece of artwork and you get that *zing* feeling where it's like, “ooh, this has an emotional connection. It makes you want to cry. It makes me feel something?” I didn’t feel anything when I looked at [one of the earlier pieces].... To me, it felt like [the soft sculpture] had that zing ‘cause the mediums I really felt reflected the pain and the fragility of someone, and the experience of sexual assault, a lot better.

All three students, but especially Brianna and Paige, had this experience of realizing that they needed to rethink the direction of their work, and of specifically relying on their feelings as a barometer of whether they were on the right track or not. Dissatisfaction, frustration, or boredom were all signals that they needed to change or clarify something about their approach. Relatedly, they all realized that the more specific and personal an idea was, the more successful and engaging it felt.

Personal Definitions of Success

There were slight variations in the three students’ orientation to the idea of success in the context of the Sustained Investigation. Most associated success with personal challenge and meeting high expectations, and some students also talked about the role of technical excellence and communication to an audience, including evoking feelings in the viewer.

Personal challenge. Olivia spoke about the importance of challenging herself in her work and had framed this as a central goal of her Sustained Investigation: “I was just trying to make something that I hadn’t seen before.” At the same time, she acknowledged that students might opt to place greater value on pursuing work that they knew they could pull off successfully. The other two students spoke about high expectations, both self-defined and

external, surrounding the quality of their work, but Olivia was the only student to identify stretching herself, both technically and conceptually, as a primary driver for her work.

Craftsmanship and communication. Paige defined success for her Sustained Investigation by linking together two concepts: craftsmanship and clarity of communication. The work needed to be well-executed in order for her to feel it had been successful, but she acknowledged that sometimes that ideas driving her work were difficult for outside viewers to decipher. When she made work that seemed to communicate something well, this felt like a different level of success. In particular, it was communication of personally-relevant ideas that held value—to know that "things that I wanted to express, even without the concentration, that were important to me," had been understood by another person.

Conveying and evoking feelings. Brianna's guiding definition of success centered on the ability to express her own feelings in her work, and to cause an emotional reaction on the part of the viewer: "I wanted people to look at my art and think, I can feel the pain, almost. I can connect to this on a deeper level than I was able to before."

In reflecting on advice she would give to new AP students about what makes a good idea, Brianna talked about the importance of not pursuing "overdone" topics but to focus on something that held personal meaning. This was not merely out of an interest in originality; she believed that work on common themes would always be somewhat removed from the artist, and that deeply personal ideas would inherently lend themselves to the creation of stronger work. If a student is interested in a somewhat general topic, to her, this is just an indication that they might want to dig deeper around that topic. She tied this back to an interest in using feelings as the basis of artwork:

> I feel like it's important to... If you're feeling something deep, that's the best time to make art, 'cause then you can put that deepness into your art. And if you're doing

> something kind of shallow, where you don't really feel anything about it, you're going to get that. Whatever you feel, you're going to reflect in your artwork, and you should always reflect the deepest and most powerful of your emotions.

Defining Process and Practice

All three students from this arts magnet school described processes of navigating their Sustained Investigations that were highly individual, and that emphasized the notion that the central idea of a Sustained Investigation is reflected as much in the artist's working process as much as it is in the subject matter of the work.

Writing. In developing her portfolio, Olivia spoke about using writing as a tool to guide herself from one piece to the next: she wrote down themes and emotions as a way to focus her attention on areas that might interest her or that might form the basis of a new work. Paige had a similar process of using words to structure her ideas; she would begin with lists, and move on to sketches from there:

> I would make a list of ideas every two weeks that I would make a new piece and then I would go through, sketch them out with the ones that I liked most and then I would try and kind of stick to that, in the painting. I'd make a new set of ideas every time and then whichever one seems like the most understandable to the viewer, that's the one I would do.

Envisioning and experimenting. In Olivia's case, she balanced her use of organizing lists with a highly visual process—sometimes envisioning pieces in detail, like the puffy white house, before setting about creating them. In the creation of these pieces, experimentation with materials was a necessary stage—sometimes an extended one—in order to figure out the mechanics of how this envisioned work would be built. In other words, she experimented with materials until her sculptures matched the image in her mind.

Working intuitively. In contrast, Brianna also talked about experimentation, but in a play-centered way: she began working with materials without a specific idea of where it might

lead. Of all three students, Brianna's process was the most intuitive, guided by her feelings and gut reactions to materials and ideas. "It is definitely a process," she reflected. "At the start of my piece, I never know where it's going to go, to be honest." She described a nightmare that had initiated ideas for one of her soft sculptures—or rather, it initiated feelings that she continued to process as she played with materials, which led to her idea.

> I was messing around with sand inside a pantyhose...One day, I was literally just playing with it. And I was just throwing it up in the air and I was like, "This feels really heavy." And I was kind of moving it. And I was like, "If you did it in a worm shape, it would be almost kind of phallic." I went, "Oh!" And I thought: paper, fragility, virginity, that kind of thing. Idea after idea, after idea. And it just sort of... It's about playing with the mediums that really pushes me.

For Brianna, her emotional responses even help her to determine when her work is done. "After I make a piece," she reflected, "I feel less stressed. And I feel like I've done something good for myself."

Sustained Investigation vs. independent work. Students at this magnet school were obviously extremely personally invested in their work; they strove to create pieces that were meaningful, and that were exceptionally well executed. Although the work mattered to them—indeed, perhaps *because* it mattered so much—all three of the students here touched on the idea of burnout in relation to the Sustained Investigation. When speaking about completing and submitting their Sustained Investigations, and feeling free to make truly independent work once again, all participants here described a sense of relief, and an interest in continuing to make art, but not art that had to be "about" anything. Olivia had talked about enjoying the projects that required "little emotional investment," because they were valuable in other ways, and Paige and Brianna shared remarkably similar sentiments. At the close of the academic year, Paige said she thought, "there's so much stuff I can do now. I can watercolor, I can oil paint. I don't have to do anything about art or what it means to people." She described the work she had made over the

summer as “thoughtless,” and driven by the simple questions of, “what do I want to create right now? What feels good?” Brianna noticed the distinction between her Sustained Investigation and the work that she was drawn to over the summer as well:

> Weirdly enough, it’s kind of almost the opposite of what other people do, I think, as people do their personal artwork at home, and then do their more pretty artwork at school, and for me it’s the exact opposite in that I go home so I can play and do things that make me... Just for fun, like watercolor, and things that... I’ll just watercolor birds and people and random stuff. It’s just about connecting back with the idea that art can just be for fun, it doesn’t have to have an idea, you can just kind of play with it.

In other words, while the Sustained Investigation and their own personal work were both deeply personally meaningful to them, they could not necessarily reconcile the processes of creation between the two—these different types of work existed for different reasons entirely.

Teacher Role and Influence

Students spoke about the role that their teacher played not only in their understanding of what the Sustained Investigation was to begin with, but how it should be undertaken. This role or influence was likely more pronounced this year: in a school that was new to AP participation, students could not draw on the work of previous AP students to inform their understanding of what the Sustained Investigation was.

Setting high expectations. Although their work was so clearly personally-driven, students were also keenly aware of the outside audiences who would be evaluating it, and all of them described an expectation of achievement and recognition that was set for them. Brianna recalled,

> He wanted to really put us into the global sphere, so to speak. He’s like, “I want to be in AP because you get more recognition.” He’s like, “You guys are talented, and I want to see you get recognized for what you do” which I thought was a beautiful thing. I feel like people don’t really get recognized for what they do in art and they should be, ‘cause it’s hard to do.

Olivia had also noticed this expectation of achievement, and noted that while she was proud of her work, she probably would not have pursued it independently; this continued awareness of an outside audience influenced both the content of her work and the experience of pursuing it. She explicitly stated that she wanted to challenge herself, and then tied this goal to the fact that it was work that was externally scored. Paige expressed a similar observation about the expectation of high achievement, and worried that her school was perhaps too focused on AP scores as a marker of success:

> The first year, it was important that the portfolio scored highly because it was important that doing AP and sending in scores to AP was something that the school wanted to continue. And mostly, my school probably cared more about the scores itself than it did about artists making really cool work. Any AP class feels like that. Where it's more about the score than what you actually learned from the course. Like any, Environmental Science, Language, so anything, it feels more about getting the score and doing well on the test than it does about actually learning the material. Because schools get more recognition and more money and more students and donors if they have higher scores.

Teacher guidance in defining ideas. All three students described a process whereby their teacher had everyone prepare a list of Sustained Investigation ideas to discuss and refine with him. Brianna described this feedback and recalled him saying,

> "I really want you to go deeper into, what does this mean, how does it affect people? What are you going to do when you let this art out into the world? What is it going to change?" That kind of thing. He really wanted you to think deeply and think big which I really appreciated. Because a lot of teachers are like, "Stick in this tiny box," and he's like, "No, I want you to explode, go supernova, do something amazing." That's what he kind of wanted.

Brianna added that once students narrowed down their lists, Mitch would give feedback on "whether [the ideas were] super creative or not." Paige echoed this, noting that Mitch would let students know if certain ideas were "overplayed or overdone." In saying this, she clarified that it was never his job to fully veto an idea: "A lot of the stuff he said was... You can do an overdone topic if you present it in a new way." All three students from this school reinforced this

idea, that while their teacher advised them on possible directions for their work, ultimately the choices they made were completely their own. Olivia described his approval of her idea as almost incidental, because she had already determined that this would be the direction for her work.

Teacher representing reader point of view. Brianna noted that Mitch encouraged everyone to do work that was "individual," but also that he wanted them to produce a Sustained Investigation that "would catch the eye of the readers," balancing internally- and externally-driven priorities. All three students noted that their teacher often stressed that Sustained Investigation work should be visually cohesive, and that this was a part of the impactful quality that they should strive for. The message was that their ideas would be clearer and more effective if they were visually conveyed in a way that clearly united the entire body of work as a cohesive whole. Brianna recalled that,

> He'd line up all your pieces together on his screen... He'd be like, "Okay, look at all these works. Which ones do you think don't really fit?" He's like, "I'm thinking this one doesn't look cohesive. These ideas are really great, but maybe you should do this to them." He would give me the full-on feedback where he'd be like, "Okay, curriculum-wise, this is what you need to do, so you can get a six or a seven on your AP portfolio."

Of all of the guidance that these students described, this was the only aspect that they clearly found hindering; all three students noted that they would have preferred to have worked with a broader range of materials and processes, but that they were advised that they should limit themselves for consistency. The AP program evaluates three portfolio types—2D, 3D, and Drawing—and students found it limiting to organize their work in terms of its dimensionality. Paige noticed that there were students in her class who had "really interesting ideas that didn't really fit into the AP category... it shouldn't be about you trying to fit your work to the concentration, it should be the Concentration trying to fit your work."

What Makes a Good Sustained Investigation

When asked to consider what they would advise new AP students as to what makes a strong Sustained Investigation, students described qualities very similar to their own personally-defined criteria for success: the work must be original, it should be ambitious, and the artist should care deeply about his or her chosen focus.

Originality and personal voice. Students spoke to the importance of not choosing an overdone or cliché topic for their Sustained Investigation, especially considering that hundreds or thousands of other students might have similar ideas. Brianna recalled a recent conversation:

> I actually did talk to a girl about this, she told me she wanted to do her Concentration on fears and phobias and I told her, "I already know two kids who did that last year. And if I know, just one person, knows two kids already did that, I probably wouldn't recommend that one."

Paige noted, though, that originality is still possible with conventional topics, reasoning that "it just has to be original in the way you present it." When selecting an idea, she felt it was more important to be sure that there was enough room for movement to allow a range of works to be produced from a single idea. "Is it showing the viewer something that they hadn't thought about before?," she asked. "Can you make a whole bunch of different pieces with different meanings," for that body of work?

Passion. Brianna in particular was driven by the idea of having passion for one's work. She explained that without passion, the artist might burn out faster, and the quality of the work also suffers. For Brianna, this element of passion was also closely linked to emotional expression. "Whatever you feel," she explained, "you're going to reflect in your artwork, and you should always reflect the deepest and most powerful part of your emotions." She described advice she recently gave to a peer, linking this element of passion to the idea of originality:

> I was like, "You probably should choose a Concentration topic that relates to you personally," I was like, "that way it's individual. And if it's individual it's going to be different from everyone else's. And not to mention, it's going to drive that personal passion, you're going to want to keep working on it." So I told her, I was like, "Try to find something that you are really passionate about. Let's say you had a personal relation, like you volunteered once to plant trees and you're really into environmental stuff, then do that 'cause they're going to have a personal relation too, you're going to understand it deeper, and you're going to want to do it."

Olivia framed this passion as "emotional investment" and agreed that it is something to take into consideration while selecting a topic, although she was less convinced that the artist necessarily needed to be deeply emotionally invested. For her, using new media and processes kept her highly emotionally invested in her work, and she felt that if she had stayed with more familiar approaches, she would perhaps have cared a bit less:

> I guess it sort of depends from student to student in terms of how much they're invested in this portfolio, and what they want to get out of it, 'cause I know that a lot of people made portfolios that were much more sort of in the vein of what they were already doing with their art and that were... I don't want to say more simple, but it just seemed like they had a very clear idea of what they were doing and there was maybe less emotional investment or was less emotionally draining whereas I spent most of my time outside of school working on it. But that's definitely something to take into consideration too, is how much do you want to get out of the Concentration and how much time do you have to really put into it?

Arts Magnet: Teacher

Although he was new to the arts magnet school this year (having come from a different magnet program several states away), Mitch, the AP teacher, clearly had a deep fondness for his students and the work they challenged themselves to create. He expressed an almost paternal pride in describing their ideas and their work. Mitch was clearly interested in students making their mark as student artists—in earning the high scores and external recognition—and he structured the course with the underlying expectations that students would rise to the challenge. As he spoke, it became clear that he set the bar high because he knew students could reach it; he

felt that he was advocating for them and getting them their just rewards by encouraging them to share their work on this broader platform.

Defining the Sustained Investigation

Mitch's students were somewhat familiar with the AP portfolio structure, but as this was the school's first year of formal participation in the program, it was his role to ensure that students understood, in depth, what the Sustained Investigation was all about, and what was required of them. In explaining to me how he described this section to students, he echoed students' recollections that this was a considerable undertaking: describing the Sustained Investigation, he said, was a matter of "getting students to understand that this is something big; this is a challenge."

He conceptualized the Sustained Investigation in other terms as well, and these descriptions aimed to strike a balance between somewhat opposing ideas. The work should represent both unity of concept and variety of exploration methods. In addition, he advised that students should be mindful that this work exists for two audiences: the students themselves, and an outside audience of readers.

Unity and variety. Mitch explained that the Sustained Investigation had to be clearly defined, and that each piece in the series should clearly relate to the student's overall idea. At the same time, however, students should demonstrate a range of approaches to the exploration of that idea. He explained that "it really is that tight rope that you're walking between continuity and variety inside of... kind of a narrow focus." In his view, the variety of approaches was important because it signified a willingness to grow and experiment in the pursuit of one's work:

> You want to be able to see that visual connection and that conceptual connection between this idea throughout all the work, but you want to be able to see it tackled in

> different ways. You want to be able to see this grow and you want to see these things in different ways.

Work for two audiences. Mitch explained that he wanted students to understand that the Sustained Investigation was meant to be personally meaningful, but that this point of view must be balanced by the awareness that this body of work would also be evaluated by people who were not present for its making. He spoke about striving to remove his own personal preferences and biases from advising students in the process of defining and developing their Sustained Investigations, but that he did want them to be closely familiar with the criteria by which this work would be scored. He acknowledged that this tension between creating work for yourself and for someone else can be "a tough set of things to be holding at the same time, as you're working."

It might seem that this presents students with a choice that represents conflicting values: a student can make work that is primarily for yourself *or* for the readers, but it could be difficult for it to be fully both. Mitch spoke about Brianna's intensely personal work as a valuable artistic experience in itself, but noted the external recognition that this work also earned her. Brianna herself had earlier observed that personal work seems to carry an inherent strength that enables these outer accolades, and Mitch made comments to the same effect:

> I'm so incredibly proud. A few students... have tackled some things like that, that there's so much courage that's involved with a teenager who can talk about those things through their artwork and to be able to share that with strangers in a lot of ways, and I know that that can be very therapeutic, too, but it can be super, super hard... I'm so proud of her for following through with that. And she was rewarded, she won a National Scholastic Portfolio this year. It's phenomenal to see her rewarded for all that risk-taking and courage. It can be kind of high-stakes to put yourself out there that far, and it's so gratifying to hear about when it's received the way that you would hope it would be when you put that much of yourself in your work.

Although he set a goal of achievement and recognition, then, Mitch's point of view was that this only reinforced the value of creating personally meaningful work, rather than being at odds with it.

Markers of Success

While Mitch broadly defined the concept and goals for the Sustained Investigation as the creation of a body of work that was a significant challenge, personally relevant, cohesive, and somewhat achievement-oriented, he had more specific descriptions to offer when defining qualities of particularly successful Sustained Investigations. When the process goes well, he shared, it results in work that is "fresh" or "original," that has a level of depth, that reflects growth and evolution over time, and that, earns high scores.

Fresh, exciting, original. Mitch explained that as students identified their ideas, he asked them to be mindful of ways that they might approach the idea "that's different from the way that other artists have pursued that." He acknowledged that some ideas concerned him, as they did not seem original enough, but that he encouraged students to continue pursuing them if they felt strongly, and to find their own perspectives on them. As a class, they talked about clichés, and approaches to the Sustained Investigation that he sees very often as a reader. He described the gratifying experience when "I can say [to a student], I was so worried when you gave this topic to me to begin with, but you found a way to really do something fresh."

Depth and meaning. Mitch explained that successful Sustained Investigations are "not just pretty to look at," but are work that "creates a visceral intellectual or emotional response." He never spoke of technical facility as an indicator on its own of a successful body of work. He repeatedly described work that used technique in the service of exploring a concept or evoking a

response. “It’s so much about depth,” he explained. He described the work of one student, where he felt the conceptual depth was especially profound:

> I had a student who did a really large installation. She got all these little Ziploc bags... and she filled them all with water. She posted them, filled an entire gallery with these. The way that the light refracted off of it was really beautiful. And people would come in, and ooh and aah at what it looked like, but then they would read the statement and she... And I said, “You have to be really careful to make sure that you have this number,” but she did 1,833 of them, which was the number of people who died during Hurricane Katrina... So it’s this initial, “Oh my God, this is huge and this is beautiful,” and to read that and to understand this connection between the media and the meaning, and water being something that sustains life and yet can destroy it at the same time. [I’m] talking to my students currently about, this is what’s possible and what makes something like that strong.

Growth and evolution. Mitch described another quality of successful Sustained Investigations as discernible growth and evolution in the body of work over time. He acknowledged that this is not necessarily linear, that “there’s peaks and valleys,” and that the process looks different for every student. He explained that it sometimes concerned students when their ideas evolved significantly, because this seemed to be at odds with the goal of creating a cohesive portfolio. He clarified:

> Not only is that okay, it’s encouraged. That’s why it’s so hard to talk about that tightrope between continuity and variety. You want to see that change, you want to see that growth. And it’s going to grow at different rates for different kids. Some of them start off at this crazy high level to begin with. It’s important for those students to know, too, that it’s okay, you started out really, really wonderful, and it’s about just maybe sustaining that rather than seeing some incredible growth that other students might be seeing because they started at different points.

In terms of longer-term outcomes, he also expressed the idea that the Sustained Investigation can be a jumping-off point for their growth and evolution as artists. “This is a starting point, right?,” he explained. “I hate to think that students are doing their best work as teenagers.”

Structures for Facilitating the Sustained Investigation

Mitch spoke at length about pedagogical structures and practices that guide students in undertaking their Sustained Investigation work. These practices included individual conferencing and vetting of ideas, doing artist research as students refine ideas, sharing exemplary portfolios, holding critiques, and guiding students in a more informal one-on-one capacity throughout the process. “I really do see this whole thing as a collaborative,” he said, “and I tell the kids... you’re going to get great help from your peers and from me.”

Individual vetting of ideas. Mitch explained that students brainstormed lists of possible directions for their work, which he referred to as a “bank of ideas.” He had them mark the ones that they felt were especially promising, and then Mitch himself reviewed the lists and noted the ones that he felt could be strong. “And then we have a second conversation,” he explained, “about what these look like and why [the student] thought they were really strong ideas, and why they’d aligned to what I was thinking, or maybe they don’t.” Mitch’s preferences never took precedence over those of the students; he maintained that these conversations were a back-and-forth understanding of the possible merits or challenges of different approaches.

Research and examples. Once a student identified an idea of particular interest, the next step was to research the ways that other artists have approached similar themes or subject matter. He noted that this grounding helped students to see where their work could be “derivative,” but helped them plan for ways to make it “original, coming from your perspective.” He did research concurrently with the students, again to compare notes but also to ensure that they saw the potential of what might be possible: “I’m showing them some exemplars that are really strong.”

On the topic of examples, Mitch also made it a point to share samples of student portfolios with his students, so they could become familiar with exemplary work, from AP and

elsewhere. He explained, “Most of the work that I show the kids is Scholastic’s National Portfolios, exemplars from the AP portfolio website, things where they recognize it not as professional work, but these are what teenagers are doing, right? This is possible.”

When it came to AP examples, he made it a point to only show top-scoring portfolios: “I don’t show students what twos and threes and fours look like... I typically don’t show them that ‘cause that’s really not my expectation.”

Critique structures. Critiques were an essential part of AP life in Mitch’s classroom, but he explained that they were a familiar routine to students of all levels at the school:

> So I start that process even with our young kids. We do a lot of critiques with my sixth and seventh graders and use a lot of the language that we do use within the AP rubric, so hopefully by the time they get to be in a position where they are taking AP curriculum, this is just the language that they use.

He made it a point to hold space in the schedule to regularly pause and review student work as it progressed—including individual works as well as the developing body of work more collectively. He described the process: “After they’ve finished with three, and after they’ve finished with six, we look at them as a body of work. Because obviously they’re not scored on individual pieces, they’re scored as a group of work.”

In addition to peer-to-peer conversations, Mitch said that at the close of the year, when students’ final collections of work were exhibited in the school, he brought in guests to view and critique their work as well. He explained that the students “do a defense of their work and... articulate what their thought processes were in this investigation,” he explained. “Obviously, that’s not part of the AP curriculum. I just love that idea.”

Ongoing feedback and coaching. Mitch also described the ways that he offered ongoing feedback and advice to students in the form of regular one-on-one conversations as they developed their ideas. In these instances, he said that he saw his role partially as a cheerleader,

offering encouragement for them to trust themselves in their work, and also to take risks and experiment with new approaches to exploring their ideas. In offering ongoing feedback, he also reminded students of scoring criteria and reader expectations, so that this awareness could inform their work as well.

Trust and encouragement. Mitch spoke of his awareness that simply offering suggestions to students did not mean his advice would be taken; this trust needed to be earned. "I don't necessarily say, 'no, don't do this,' 'cause that doesn't work," he laughed. "There's always blowback from that. You want to make sure you're maintaining that great rapport with the kids." He described the realization that some students will be naturally more resistant to advice, even when they agree with it. "You really do need to approach everything differently, and everyone differently, while holding them to the same accountability." He described that eventually, most students became accustomed to seeking out feedback on their work in progress rather than waiting for him to come to them, and that they understood that these were give-and-take conversations.

Related to the notion of trust-building is noticing the instances where students just needed confirmation that they were on the right track. In pursuing a Sustained Investigation, sometimes the only advice that they needed was to keep making their work. "They need a little bit of a pat on the back that says, 'You know, what you're doing is wonderful. Keep on doing this. You're doing a fantastic job. Don't panic.'"

Encouraging risk-taking. Mitch identified growth, change, and risk-taking as elements of successful Sustained Investigations, and he explicitly encouraged students to challenge themselves and experiment with new approaches in their work: "I've had this [in] more traditional programs, where they think art has to look like this and they don't understand that

there's so much more out there to explore in terms of media and process." Sometimes this encouragement came not from Mitch, but from students' observations of one another as they worked:

> They're starting to see what their peers are working on, some of them are doing these really risky, interesting, evocative original works, and then they start to question whether or not they can do something like that as well, or find a way to put those things into what they're investigating. And I've had students who have started over after a few weeks with something completely different or found a way to really push the boundaries with what they were investigating.

Representing the reader. Wearing the dual hats of teacher and reader could be challenging; Mitch sometimes explained to students that "it isn't me," as he advised them away from a particular direction for their work—in other words, it was not that he personally did not favor that direction, but that he worried that the student's choices did not align well with the expectations set forth in the AP rubrics. He saw it as his duty to be straightforward in giving students advice that was reflective of AP expectations:

> I'm completely honest and straightforward and I tell them that, too. I said, "Maybe the best thing that I can do for everyone in this class, I will promise you this, I will never lie to you, I'm not going to. And if this is where you are as a score, this is what it is. Please don't take that personally. I love you guys, but this is where you are, and it does you no good for me to tell you otherwise.

Furthermore, he explained that the fact that "it isn't me" is significant. They talked as a class about the reading process, and that students' work would be evaluated by professors and other AP teachers. He even described "that very low rate of discrepancies," referring to points of disagreement in the scores of a particular portfolio, reinforcing the idea that "when you get that score back, this is pretty indicative of where you are right now, and there's no way of getting around that." He acknowledged that this awareness can be "intimidating for students, for sure," but that it can also be "exciting."

From his perspective, considering the voice or expectations of the reader is not a hindrance to students' work and processes; he maintained that they found it interesting and were eager to know how others perceived their work:

> A lot of students email in the summer, "Did you ever score us? How do we do this?" [chuckle] And they really want to know how they did it, and that's... Yeah, that is a motivator, it really is. Even for those students who aren't necessarily pursuing a career in the arts or going to art school, they want to know. They want to know how their work was received by other teachers.

The Purpose of the Sustained Investigation

When thinking more broadly about why the Sustained Investigation is a worthwhile endeavor, or what he hoped his students got from the experience, Mitch spoke about the opportunity to fully identify themselves as artists, and to place themselves within a broader community of artists—to understand and relate to the work and practices of other artists beyond their school. "This is, ultimately, this huge collaboration that we're doing," he said. "We're not alone in this, we're part of that bigger picture." Bearing in mind that his is a magnet school, it seems likely that many of them do intend to continue their work as artists, and he remarked that "this is the greatest preparation we can do for kids who've decided they want to go into something like this."

Beyond that, though, Mitch also hoped that students who completed a Sustained Investigation would be proud of themselves for persevering through a process that can be both challenging and rewarding. He acknowledged the drain that his students expressed as a part of the work:

> I'm hoping that they come away with that with the idea that first of all, [they] did something special. It takes so much work, physical work and emotional tax on these kids to go through that process that is so difficult and personal. I think I would like to believe that the students take that with them in no matter what they pursue, it's the idea that you stick to it and you persevere through it and you grow through it. And so much of it is

> problem-solving and coming up with creative solutions. I think it changes the way that we think and that we do problem-solving. And I think those are skills that are... universal skills.

Chapter Summary

When describing Sustained Investigation ideas, students from this arts magnet school organized their thoughts mostly according to concepts or themes as ideas, but made it clear that their choice of media and techniques were central to their ideas as well. All three students also deliberately chose ideas of personal significance. Most of them also described processes of rethinking their work and shifting its focus in the early part of the year. The students spoke about their personal ideas of success in the Sustained Investigation as being driven by challenging oneself personally, producing well-crafted work, and in one case, evoking an emotional response on the part of the viewer. They described highly personal working processes, including using writing as a tool for organizing ideas, envisioning pieces before their creation, or responding to materials in a more playful and intuitive way in the development of a new piece. All three students drew a distinction between their Sustained Investigation work and the art that they produced independently, noting that their personal work was often more enjoyable and was less conceptually driven. These students prioritized challenging themselves in their work but also recognized the ways that their teacher set high expectations for their Sustained Investigations. They described ways that he contributed to the direction of their portfolios by discussing their initial ideas and offering ongoing feedback from a reader's point of view. When considering what they would advise others as to what makes a strong Sustained Investigation, students focused on ideas of originality and of personal passion and investment in one's ideas and work.

Their teacher, Mitch, noted that he conveyed to his students that the Sustained Investigation is meant to be challenging. His descriptions of the Sustained Investigation also expressed that this body of work might be thought of in terms of dualities: it is meant to embody unity in exploring a single idea, but variety in the ways that that exploration is executed. Similarly, he described two audiences for this work, noting that students should of course make work for themselves, driven by their own interests and preferences, but that they should be mindful of readers as an eventual audience as well. He described successful Sustained Investigations as fresh and original, as work with depth and meaning, and as work that grows and evolves over time. In guiding students through this process, he described practices of discussing and vetting student ideas in one-on-one conversations, doing research to share examples of ways that other artists had explored similar ideas, and holding regular critiques to discuss the progress of students' work. In ongoing student conversation, coaching, and feedback, he described his most important habits as offering encouragement, urging students to take risks and try new things in their work, and speaking on behalf of the reader. Ultimately, he hoped students would leave their Sustained Investigation experiences with a satisfaction and pride in having taken on challenging and significant work, and that they could see themselves as artists in a broader sphere than the classroom.

Chapter VII

FINDINGS: PUBLIC SCHOOL

This public school, situated in a suburb of a major southeastern city, only recently opened, in 2012. An expansive brick structure, the building houses a population that has grown rapidly since, currently housing over 2000 students. It is easy to see what makes the site so attractive: it is a new facility, well-resourced, with an extremely academically competitive population, and ranks among the state's top high schools. The AP Studio Art teacher, Rachel, has been there since the school's opening, and has watched the growth—both of the school and of her own program—skyrocket in the intervening years.

Constraints of time and distance made travel to the school site impossible, so I spoke with Rachel and three of her students remotely, on separate FaceTime calls. The students, all girls, were still in high school, entering their junior and senior years, and beginning their second round of AP portfolios—another testament to the air of ambition here. They described their current, nascent Sustained Investigations, but we reserved the bulk of our time for discussing the portfolios that they had completed and submitted the year before. In this school, I met a cadre of students who were deeply committed to finding not only their own original ideas, but their own unique reasons for creating: they knew *what* they were aiming for, and they knew *why*.

Portrait: Jenna

As we began our conversation, I noticed that Jenna had all of her materials prepared beforehand: the book she made as her Sustained Investigation project was sitting next to her, and she flipped through it, holding it up, as she described the individual illustrations and text. She

also had her written statement pulled up on her computer and read me portions of it as well. This is not to say that she seemed overly formal or rehearsed. Jenna was articulate, and took her work seriously, but there was a lightness in the way that she talked about herself as an artist, even while describing challenging herself, or being a perfectionist. When describing an idea that she had considered but thrown out, she remarked, "maybe one day I'll do that, but for now, *meh*." There was an openness and honesty to her reflections, and she often described the work itself by describing the experience of creating it—how it felt to make it.

Jenna explained that early in the year, her teacher gave the class a general overview of what the Sustained Investigation was meant to be: a portfolio that carries one idea across twelve images. The idea, she said, had to be "specific enough to be unique, but broad enough [that] you can make something big out of it."

She remembered that her class did not dive right into planning their Sustained Investigations but did short assignments and activities to begin thinking about the kinds of work or ideas that might appeal to them. The first assignment was to create Pinterest boards "of what inspires us." They then shared these boards with the rest of the AP students once school started. Of her own, she said,

> I just remember having a lot of similar themes of just portraits of people, and sometimes, just abstract ideas of scenery and stuff. And I had a lot of similar color schemes, mostly purple and yellow, I noticed, after I put it all together... It helped all of us envision what exactly we wanted to start with, and how we wanted to place ourselves into the artistic world, I guess.

Sharing their Pinterest boards with one another helped students to brainstorm as a group, she recalled. An image that one student shared might remind someone else of a different artist, "and then we'll look up that artist, and we'll go on this adventure of just researching artists and then we'll get back on track with the Pinterest board."

In addition to the Pinterest activity, the class did something called a "trash critique," in which each student was required to bring in an example of something unsuccessful that they had made. She said it was "really scary," but she thought the purpose of this activity "was just to show everybody, even if you hate something, it doesn't mean other people are going to, and you're fine, there's nothing to be scared of." She thought about why Rachel might have all of her students do activities like these at the beginning of the year, and decided that it had to do with trusting your own interests and instincts:

> She's really good at transitioning everybody into the idea of being your own artist, not just following every step that a teacher tells you to do... She was just really good at making everybody comfortable with everything. It's like, nothing bad is going to happen to you just because you don't like something you made.

Jenna considered a number of possibilities for her Sustained Investigation before landing on a clear direction. A few of these were good ideas, she explained, but she did not feel strongly enough about them to pursue them—pointing to the difference between a good idea and one that really motivated her. She said she recalled thinking, "I'm not really passionate about that, so how am I going to keep going with this? It's just going to bore me." She described an early, "iffy" idea:

> It was like, some of the things that society values the most shouldn't be our biggest priority... Like money and stuff, stuff like that. It would just be expanded to a ridiculous size. So, I was picturing big dollar bills just blanketing the streets, and people would be trying to crawl out of them and stuff. And just random objects like makeup and shoes and stuff, just crowding forests. And then it would be the opposite too. I had the idea of things that are really important being shrunk down to a really small size. But after a while of trying to figure out that idea, I just kind of sat there and looked at it. I was like, "I don't like this."

An early idea about word association led to the approach that she finally pursued. She started holding short interviews with other students, using a set of pre-selected words to spark conversation. She noticed that the word *nightmare* elicited vivid stories from everyone that she

spoke with, and she considered that maybe she could build an entire Sustained Investigation around these stories of nightmares. Immediately, she said, “I felt relief. When I felt that, I was like, ‘oh, wow. That’s what I’ve got to do.” This gut reaction formed the distinction between her earlier, “good” ideas and this final one:

> I felt excited about all the ideas at first, but I knew it was the one when I felt relief, that I didn’t have to do the other idea. I could see the path that I was supposed to go down, but the rest of them, I didn’t see how I could move forward with it. I would just have this idea. But once I realized, ‘oh, I can just do this. This is what I want to do,’ a path cleared.

She quickly developed a plan to illustrate the stories of the childhood nightmares that she was hearing. She explained that in addition to representing the stories themselves, she “wanted to study how that formed them as a person.” Her teacher suggested that some of the illustrations looked stylistically similar to a children’s book, and Jenna explained that that comment “got me thinking that I should actually narrate and illustrate a children’s book about the nightmares,” which is what she eventually created.

She used both paint and digital media throughout, varying her approach in each illustration in order to match the techniques to the story or the individual being represented. One of the illustrated nightmares is her father’s, from when he was young. “He was trapped in space, in this tiny little capsule,” and Jenna represented this scene in paint, using a palette knife, “just kind of doing big blocky shapes,” she explained. “It didn’t have much detail, but it got to the point. And I feel like that’s how he is.” The two-page spreads of text and image invite the viewer to consider the wide range of ways that nightmares can be unsettling: there is a dream of drowning, another scene of creatures surrounding a house, and one involving a figure in a corner illuminated by a single bare light bulb. Interviewing people and planning ways to represent their stories became addictive, she said: “I could just keep talking to people about that kind of thing forever.”

Jenna organized her work as this collection of nightmares but established her own criteria for success within this thematic organizing structure. “I did have one guideline,” she recalled, “that said that each picture was from the point of view of the dreamer,” so that the imagery aligned with the written narration. She also wanted to expand her technical capabilities and experimented with several media that were new to her, including gouache and ProCreate software. She described herself as a perfectionist and said that she knew a piece was finished when she had “no complaints anymore”—when the story was visually clear and the technical execution fulfilled her own intentions. She matched the media that she selected to the qualities of the nightmare being depicted. It was important to her to have a rationale for choices like these, and she said that this probably stemmed from the question that her teacher most often put to all of her students: *Why?* It is “the biggest question she always asks,” Jenna explained, “’cause if you can’t defend what you’re making, like, *why?,”* she laughed. She continued that Rachel “gives you ideas and things to think about, and sometimes she plays devil’s advocate, just bombarding you with questions that you don’t know how to answer at first.”

Although the stories and images in her book were not autobiographical, Jenna explained that her Sustained Investigation still felt deeply personal. First, it felt like a concrete step toward a goal of becoming a professional illustrator. This work helped her to envision who she wanted to be as an artist and convinced her that it was feasible. She described the feeling of accomplishment while hand-assembling four books from digital prints of all of her work:

> I spent hours just sitting in that room folding, gluing, cutting, making all these four books. Once I had that first one, I just looked at it, I was like, “Wow, I made this book.” I think the most important thing to me is that it made me feel like I truly belonged as an artist. Before AP, it was just like, yeah, I take a couple of art classes and I really like all this stuff, but am I serious about it?

Also, the subject matter itself interested her deeply; this gut-level excitement about the idea of working with nightmares is what convinced her it was the right path for her. As deeply as it interested her, it also made her nervous to create this work and put it in front of other people, including her peers. It was another way of putting herself out into the world, as an artist, but also as an individual with a specific point of view. "When you're doing a concentration," she explained, "you're basically telling the world about your brain, what's going on in there."

Although writing was naturally a part of the creation of the book, as the illustrations had narrative text accompanying them, Jenna did not write about her process as she worked. She developed her written statement towards the end of the year, which explained the central idea in a straightforward way. She read the first part of the statement to me:

> I wrote, "In this Concentration I am illustrating individuals' memories of vivid childhood nightmares and narrating their descriptions in the format of pages from a children's book. This work explores the connections between the individual and their reoccurring memories, environments and fears."

She explained that the second half of the statement went into more detail about her process, including not only the creation of the images but the layout and assembly of the finished book. She said, "I basically answer[ed] the question of, how did I bring this idea to life?"

Jenna completed this portfolio as a junior and decided to put together another AP portfolio during her senior year. When we spoke, she was in the very early stages of deciding what her new Sustained Investigation might be about. She described that even her brainstorming process had shifted from last year: "I came more prepared this year with ideas where I just—even if I hated them later on, I would never delete them." She said she was generally more at ease with not knowing how things will turn out:

> I'm starting to work on this one piece that I think could turn into something in my Sustained Investigation. Currently I'm working in Illustrator to recreate a picture I took of the inside of a Publix, which is... It's just kind of like an aisle that's completely empty,

> and I'm recreating it with the pen tool and stuff...I don't even know if this is going to be my idea for Sustained Investigation, but I'll never know if I don't make it. So I'm just going to make it and see what happens.

She mused that the digital drawing could be a springboard for a mixed media piece: maybe she will print it on canvas and embroider figures into the space. The plan is connected to a loosely defined idea about self-awareness in public spaces. "I haven't completely developed it yet," she said, "but I feel like I'm heading in the right track right now."

Jenna said she often catches herself giving her peers advice about their Sustained Investigations—mostly telling them not to worry: "I just tell them... you just have to work through it naturally and the idea will come to you if it's not here yet." She trusts this gut instinct to guide her, and sometimes it really just does come down to whether you want to make something badly enough or not. She considered and opted out of more "good" ideas this year, including one about documenting "the messiest part of people's houses." She said "it's like how people just shove their feelings to the back of their brain and it's like, 'don't go in here, it's messy in here.'" Ultimately, she decided that maybe people would be too embarrassed to even participate in such a project. "Maybe one day I'll do that," she said, "but for now, *meh*." She noticed that the question of purpose is always at the front of her mind, too: in addition to going with her instincts, she said she has to know why she is pursuing what she is. "I make everything with a purpose now," she explained.

In her second year, she was also deeply receptive to the energy of the classroom space as a community of artists. They had just shared their Pinterest boards with one another, and she enjoyed the cross-pollination of ideas that seemed to happen naturally, explaining that even similar topics and ideas can bring out the uniqueness in each student's point of view:

> Seeing their inspirations in front of you, even if their ideas are similar, where it's coming from is always completely different, which means that their style is going to be

> completely different. There are a few people in my class this year who had a lot of space-theme stuff on their Pinterest board, a lot to do with space, and planets, and stuff, but they were all completely different. One of them was retro posters and stuff and then one of them was the dreamy nebula stuff. You can tell that it's all coming from different places.

Having put her work through the reading process once, Jenna said that she has never really been too concerned with her score. "I don't feel like knowing that somebody else was going to be grading it really changed the way I made it." Although she may have favored her own instincts and levels of satisfaction to know when her work was successful, she admitted that the "platform" of AP gave her a reason to push herself to work hard: "so I'm scared for afterwards, what I'm going to do when I don't have that kind of platform."

Public School: Students

In addition to Jenna, I spoke with two of her peers. Michelle was entering her junior year at the time that we talked. She drew and painted fantasy worlds based on dreams and her imagination. Haley, the other student, was beginning her senior year, and had transferred to the school as a junior. She spent that year developing a Sustained Investigation of paintings concerned with the unrealistic online identities that women sometimes fabricate for themselves. If the students at other school sites were about pushing themselves, or taking on the role of artist, students at this school seemed most centered on the process of creating *no matter what*, and about trusting the process to naturally guide the development of the work.

Defining Ideas

All three students approached their work very differently, but they described their ideas and processes in a few fundamentally similar ways. First, they described their Sustained Investigations as explorations of ideas or concepts. In addition, their work was deeply personally

resonant, although for very different reasons. This personal quality was central to their definitions of a Sustained Investigation idea as well.

Idea as exploration of a concept. Although Jenna initially approached her work in a somewhat methodical way, with a list of ideas and then pursuing one about word association, she eventually focused on a single word—nightmares—to explore as a central concept. In her explanation, the work was not just about nightmares, but about the effects that they have on the dreamer—how they relate to the life and personality of the subject.

For Haley's Sustained Investigation, she said she wanted to explore "objectification in a virtual world," considering the ways that women present themselves online. She did a series of mostly figurative paintings of women in exaggerated poses, with additional symbolic elements meant to critique the idea of invented online personas. She explained, "I'm against the idea that women feel like they have to be something crazy different than what they are on a platform, and that's what makes them feel sexy." She viewed is as a kind of "dysmorphia," and said that "what I wanted people to take away was, what's on there isn't real."

Michelle's Sustained Investigation was an exploration of her own dreams: vivid experiences full of otherworldly creatures that she wanted to get to know better by documenting them. Her aim was to "recreate scenes from the dreams," both in straightforward and more symbolic terms. She had developed an entire system of organizing her dreams by content and by type—a "level one" dream or a "level four" dream—and used her Sustained Investigation to explore these worlds more fully.

For all three students, their Sustained Investigations could not be described as being strictly thematic—they were not just about nightmares or online identities or dreams. Rather, these artists described a very particular orientation or point of view towards their subjects or

ideas: they were able to articulate what it was about these themes that they wanted to explore, understand, or communicate to an audience.

Personal relevance of ideas. All three students also emphasized the personal significance of their ideas, explaining that this was what made them strong. Jenna found meaning in creating work that directly related to her career goals of being an illustrator. In addition, she selected subject matter that was deeply personally engaging, and that made her a little bit excited and nervous: realizing that she was putting herself out there, in a positive way.

Michelle made work about her own invented world, which even had its own language. As she represented her dreams, she was further developing her own visual language too. She used her Sustained Investigation as an opportunity to expand on the types of drawings that she had always liked to draw, but that she had rarely pursued in school:

> I do a lot of like, not really Gothic art, but [I'm] very into monsters, and the unknown supernatural kind of stuff. That's kind of a lot of what I already draw, like monsters and everything, so it was just a different route that I went down for the concentration, like I was trying to define something that I haven't necessarily gone for, like I haven't really tried to define before.

She explained beginning her Sustained Investigation by "just trying to get the stories out... because I hid them for a long time," worrying that they would seem strange to others.

Haley's Sustained Investigation idea was inspired not only by online experiences, but by her status as a new student in her high school. She said the idea of objectification, because,

> ...it was just really on my mind especially being new. I was trying to make friends, and I was just like, "man, I wish I could just meet people not as a female."

Personal Definitions of Success

Students here spoke to a certain balance in their understandings of what made a Sustained Investigation successful. First the works should demonstrate a degree of technical mastery, but also, they should communicate a feeling or idea to an audience.

Technical excellence. Jenna said knew she was satisfied with her work "when I have no complaints anymore," and about the intense satisfaction of holding a professional-looking finished product: "I made this." She set high technical standards for herself as an artist, and these features related heavily to her feeling of success in her Sustained Investigation. Michelle had similar views, saying that, "if something doesn't feel detailed enough to me, that's when I don't like it typically, or [if] something doesn't have enough going on." Haley also chose her subject matter with an eye towards her interest in figurative painting, and recognized the ability to explore what she called "skin complexities" would keep her motivated. She described the visual effects of some of these complexities as some of the elements of her work that made her the most proud.

Conveying a feeling. All three students wanted not only to produce technically excellent work, but for that work to evoke a feeling. In Haley's paintings, she aimed for the viewer to be unsettled by the imagery. In modeling her work after online photos or profiles, she wanted the viewer to realize that as you are introduced to each of these women, "you know all the wrong things about them." Both Jenna and Michelle dealt with dream-related imagery, and in each case, they sought to not only illustrate the content of the dream or nightmare, but to use media purposefully to evoke the feeling of the dream as well. For Michelle, the "accuracy" of how well her drawings and paintings represented her dreams became a clear marker of success. When

sharing a few of her pieces on our call, she remarked, “I was very happy with these. This was probably the most accurate of all of them, compared to the dream itself.”

Defining Process and Practice

Each student also described individual pathways into creating the work that formed their Sustained Investigations, although they all began by using media and techniques that they had personal strengths and familiarity with. Throughout all their comments there was an overarching understanding that ideas need time, space, and experimentation to develop—Michelle described it initially as “trial and error.” All three students spoke to this evolutionary nature of artmaking.

As their work progressed, they developed more individual sensibilities with these media, and found ways to expand on their practice and experiment with new techniques. In Jenna’s Sustained Investigation, she began with some of her strengths in painting, and then branched out to digital media in completing some of the dream representations, and challenged herself to match her media choice with the person or dream being represented.

Haley described the ways that her own preferences and sensibilities changed over time, as both her material choices and her use of imagery and symbolism transformed and clarified:

> I [thought], I’m going to do oil paint [the] entire time, and I wanted to just be really fleshy and thick. And then about halfway through, I decided to go back to gouache because I wanted this watery blended feel... The oil paint felt almost too real, and I wanted to feel like a virtual wasteland kind of thing, so I wanted to go for a little more lucid, a little more dreamlike. So I felt like the gouache and watercolor kinda accomplished that a little bit more, kind of lined up with what I was going for a little bit better.

She explained that “each piece gets more narrow and a little bit stricter and more disciplined in connecting to my idea.” She started developing a visual language for herself in her work, using shapes that mimicked text bubbles, or working with exaggerated poses that relate to what one might see in Instagram selfies. These conventions contributed to the “narrowing” of the work,

which she described not as putting herself into a box, but as building parameters for her work and limiting her options so as to not get overwhelmed. Of her body of work as a whole, she said, “the first one’s me kind of fumbling around...and then the last two are like I figured it out.” Michelle also spoke about formulating her own visual language or aesthetic sensibilities: she explained that her work is related to fantasy-style art, but that she hopes elements of it were different too: “it’s got the whimsy [of fantasy], but it’s still very moody.”

Figure 5

Student Art: Haley

In addition to developing their own processes, the students spoke in terms of developing an intuition of what was working or not working well. Jenna spoke several times about that feeling of “just knowing” or “relief” at having an idea that made sense. Michelle spoke about this too, and also emphasized that this intuition related to her view of herself as her work’s primary

audience, since she was the person who would know best whether she was representing her dreams the way she remembered or experienced them:

> It was more just like doing whatever felt right. I just wanted to do something that kind of accurately, to myself, represented the dreams or actually brought the scenes from the dreams. Some of them are symbolic and some of them aren't, but it's still something like when I look at it, I understand what it means, but other people might not... but that was the point of the Concentration is not to tell other people, it's kind of like just to figure out on my own.

Haley also described an artmaking process that was "almost always introspective," saying "I use art as my therapy, which is probably bad, but I definitely do that." She talked about artmaking as a way of figuring out how she felt about certain things, or figuring out how to communicate that to others.

In continuing to build and experiment, Michelle and Haley especially described a process of clarifying their overall intention for their Sustained Investigations. Michelle said, "it was attacking a central idea, but it was still experimenting with a central idea. It wasn't as concrete." If the work felt derivative at first, she reasoned that this was also a part of the process, and was just something to work through:

> That's just where you start. I remember in psychology, my psychology teacher was like, "Humans are mimickers." We like to mimic everyone else. So start out by mimicking. But then, the important thing about art is that you get away from that mimicking, and you build off. The mimicking is supposed to help you learn, but then you branch off to your other stuff to expand yourself.

Writing and process. None of the three students described their written statements in great detail, but writing did enter the processes of each student in different ways. For Jenna, writing became a part of the work itself; it was image in conversation with text. For Michelle and Haley, writing was extensively woven into their artmaking processes. They wrote in order to clarify their work—to map out their ideas and figure out what they were interested in to begin with. Michelle described it as "solving the puzzle," and explained that she sometimes wrote out

very long dreams before thinking about how to visually represent them. Writing was a serious endeavor for her on its own: at one point in our conversation she casually mentioned that she had already self-published a book and was presently working on a comic. Haley did not focus as much on writing meant to be a product in itself, but she deeply believed in writing as a way of clarifying art-based ideas and preferences. She said that she often advised AP peers to write about their work when they were struggling with their ideas: "just write a paragraph and then all the sudden you're gonna surprise yourself with the next thing you write and be like, 'Oh my God, there it is.'"

Influence of Audiences

Whereas students in other school sites spoke generally about two external audiences for their work—teacher and reader—students here also talked about a general awareness of "others" seeing their work. This "other" generally surfaced when they spoke about worrying that their work might be perceived as strange. They spoke of their teacher as an audience and collaborator, always turning the tables and inquiring more deeply about what it was that *they*, as artists, were out to do.

Peers and personal audiences. Jenna remarked that the scary part about a Sustained Investigation is that it lets other people see "what's going on in your head." The unspoken concern linked to this is, what will people think of what you show them? Specifically, will they think you are strange? All students spoke of an awareness of outside audiences in general, especially peers. It seemed that it was not the opinions of eventual College Board audiences that concerned them, but rather the people around them. Students acknowledged their fears about others' perceptions, but described efforts not to be influenced by them; instead, they tried to

work against this fear and deliberately produce more of the work that they previously would have hid from others.

As Haley was in the process of formulating ideas for her second Sustained Investigation, she started reconsidering the drawings of creatures that she secretly did in her sketchbook. Some of her friends had seen them, and she said that their response was "you have issues. This is terrifying." She explained that she was now challenging herself to not worry about those perceptions:

> Instead of just being afraid of what people see in my art and how creepy it gets, and how gory it gets, I think I just need to... This year, I told myself, "You're not going to be a people pleaser this year, you're going to do the weird stuff you want to do, you're going to do your surreal scenes, you're going to do your surreal faces."

She explained that this was difficult because, "I like doing what I know will look good," but that this year, "I'm trying to tell myself, just run with it, let it get weird, and I'm really excited about it."

Michelle, of course, also had a long history of drawing monsters, and this interest made its way into the dream representations in her Sustained Investigation. She described a situation very similar to Haley's, wherein she initially hid these personal drawings from others:

> Sometimes I'm very conscious about what I'm drawing. Especially when I was younger, I would get... before I started to draw monsters and aliens and stuff, I was very nervous about drawing them because I thought people would think I was strange or very, I don't know, different. Even though that's all widely accepted in the community now, it's like, "Great. Monsters." But it was something I was very consciously aware, like, "This is a strange thing to do." So, when I finally got out of that box, I started to expand my art. So this [Sustained Investigation] was kind of like another way for me to expand again.

The students here often spoke about "being weird" or "getting weird" in their work, but it was never about wanting to shock viewers or purposefully make them think of the artist as strange.

Their intentions in “being weird” were in to make the work they truly wanted to make, without letting fear of judgment influence them.

Teacher influence. Although the work of most students was inherently quite personal, they did clearly value the opinions and feedback of their teacher as their Sustained Investigations developed. When they described Rachel’s influence on their process, they all spoke of the ways in which she encouraged them to trust themselves and explore and experiment to find their own processes, rather than forcing outside structures or expectations onto them. She was concerned that students produce work regularly, and that the work was important to them personally. She was a sounding board for ideas and a provider of encouragement and reassurance. Jenna remembered that, “I think she said that’s like her mantra—something along the lines of, “don’t worry about it, just make it. Just go ahead and get started.”

Michelle valued Rachel’s advice that students’ own lives and experiences should be the source of their work; she recalled that Rachel told everyone to “choose something that means a lot to you...choose an issue that matters to you, or something that happened in your life.”

Haley was relieved to find that Rachel’s view of the Sustained Investigation was that all of the pieces did not have to appear visually similar. Haley felt freer to experiment in her work without an expectation that all of her pieces would be clearly visually aligned. She also appreciated that Rachel allowed her students to find their own way through their processes:

> [She] was like, if you get stuck, put it down, start something else. And so what was cool about that that I didn't know would work so well, is I would drop a piece and we would talk about it, and I talk about it [with her], and she plants some ideas in my head and I talked to her about it and kinda write stuff down and then I put it away for a week and do something else and come back and the answer was clear, always, it never failed to be like, "Okay this is what I’m doing now, I’m ready for it.”

Michelle said that Rachel had defined the Sustained Investigation as “basically just a big expression of yourself.” She explained that she would go to Rachel if she had technical questions

or “if I needed help, especially with how to execute something,” but that for the most part, she felt trusted to make her work more or less independently.

What Makes a Good Sustained Investigation

Students had their own personal criteria for success in the Sustained Investigation, but they also spoke about more general guidelines that they would advise anyone to follow. Their advice followed two general themes that could sometimes be seen in opposition to one another. First, most of them felt that students should make work that makes them happy, or that is deeply important to them personally. Also, though, both Jenna and Haley spoke with conviction about the importance of having a clearly defined purpose in one’s work.

Work that makes you happy. Michelle said that when her teacher often told students to focus on “whatever sets your heart on fire,” and that she offered this same advice when her new AP peers were struggling to find a direction for their work:

> I’m like, “Whatever makes you happy is what you do, whatever interests you.” So I know a lot of people struggle with their Concentration ‘cause sometimes they think it’s not good enough, it’s too cliche. I’m like, “Does it make you happy, though? Does it make you happy to make these works?” And they’re like, “Yes,” so I’m like, “Yes, it’s what you do. Doesn’t matter if you think it’s already been an idea that’s been pursued a lot, but you just do it.”

Haley reiterated this advice, but noted that she had learned that the defined idea does not necessarily need to come first. She explained that her teacher had taught her, “try to find stuff you like and do that you’re passionate about, and then apply an idea to it.”

Work that has a purpose. Although Haley recognized that there are many pathways into an idea, she felt strongly that artists need a clear purpose for their work as they produce it. Jenna commented on this too, identifying *why* as the question that guided her work, and making it a priority that her work always has a purpose. Haley explained that she felt a purpose needed to be

clarified at the outset, while her teacher thought that students might sometimes need to work their way into their purpose. Haley explained that "she would be like, well, sometimes you feel around with what you like to do, and what you like to create. I'm like, no, always have a purpose." Haley's view was more firm, in other words. She continued:

> If you don't have a purpose behind a piece... it's a completely different entity. I'm telling you, if you have a reason why you're making it and everything has a purpose, the feel of the piece is different... It's way more emotional, way more impactful. People in my class did the same thing where they would just be like, "Well I like space and I like cupcakes, so I did cupcakes floating in space," and I was just like... "Where is your purpose? Where is that energy gonna come from?" 'Cause that's really what it comes down to is you're making people feel things by looking at your art.

Public School: Teacher

In speaking with Rachel, it was easy to see how her students had become so comfortable with delving so deeply into their own interests and processes. She described the ways that throughout the year, she structured everything about her course in ways that would facilitate students' finding of their own interests and voices as artists, and their own "why" of their individual processes. She described a pedagogical practice of serving as a warm and consistent sounding board, reflecting students' own ideas back to them and enabling them to clarify their work for themselves.

Defining the Sustained Investigation

When describing how she conceptualizes the Sustained Investigation and explains the structure or goals to her students, Rachel spoke only in very broad terms, emphasizing the process as a "journey" that will unfold over time:

> It's almost like it's its own being that you're just kind of navigating the course beside. You're not in control of it, really. You're in control of your interpretation of it, but you're not able to tell it where it's gonna go, it tells you. So you have to be open and receptive to

> the fact that you have to navigate the course with it, and treat it as a partner and not a slave.

She found that focusing too much on structures of the Sustained Investigation only distracted students, because they latched on to perceived rules that she did not agree with. She recalled that when Haley first joined her class after transferring from another school where she had participated in AP, "she could not get it out of her brain [that] she had to make twelve pieces and visually, they all had to align." To Rachel, the emphasis on discovery and evolution would indicate that the body of work is not necessarily completely visually cohesive; to her, Haley was cutting off her own process by worrying about achieving an overall similarity. Reconnecting to the journey metaphor, Rachel contended that "your journey is always going to have memory," and that each work "connect[s] back to where you've been." In other words, some kind of thread of continuity is necessary, but it is almost inevitable when all of the work comes from the hand of the same artist.

Markers of Success

Consistent production. Since Rachel's focus is on the evolution of ideas or the journey of art-making, she is less concerned with students being able to firmly define their ideas at the start of the year, although they do start thinking about possible areas of focus then. A successful Sustained Investigation, in her view, is one that a student explores consistently over a long period of time; it is one in which they never stop creating, reflecting, and creating some more. She remarked that "they're always like, 'I don't know what I'm gonna do for my concentration,'" and that her response is always, "all that matters is that you make stuff, and you keep making stuff."

Evolution and surprise. In these early stages, she explained, students might be able to identify a general idea to pursue for their Sustained Investigations, but that truly understanding what it is about that idea that interests them is a longer-term goal and is something that might unfold slowly. She described one Sustained Investigation that a student in her class had recently begun:

> I have one student right now, she's a sophomore, and she's like, "I think I'm really interested in murder." [chuckle] And I'm like, "Okay, let's see how that goes." She's like, "I love crime stories. I think the psychology is fascinating," but she's like, "I don't want to just show crime scene tape, or whatever." She found an old farm stand [nearby]... and so she's buying peaches and mutilating and crushing and bruising them, and she's putting all of these destructed peaches all over the scene to start playing around with the idea of a murder scene, but embodied by fruits and vegetables, and put them in these kind of alarming context, where you're unsettled but you don't know why.

Rachel also talked specifically about this element of surprise in successful Sustained Investigations, as this is evidence of a student's own voice or point of view coming through. She is wary of work that is primary technically beautiful, or that is consistently beautiful in the same way throughout the body of work. She recalled that Haley came in to class with a few paintings that she thought could form the basis of a concentration, and Rachel said her response was that "they're stagnant... they're all the same, you just changed the composition a little bit." In her view, successful Sustained Investigations include visual evidence of growth, experimentation, and risk-taking:

> If I think about Kara Walker, she made a sculpture out of sugar when she was talking about slavery. I think... And went from these cut-outs. And so you see these huge jumps. Like if you look at any professional artist, what they're making the work *about* is still there, but the product is so widely different, but you still see them in it.

Avoiding cliché. In contrast then, Rachel specifically warns students away from creating work that she sees as cliché or overdone. She remembered a student who was interested in food photography, but that in reviewing this student's early work, Rachel's response was, "I can

Google these as a stock image and find them." She pressed the student further: "what is individual about your interpretation of this food photography?" She also created a Pinterest board called "Danger Zone," and explains that sharing this is a way to "talk about cliché choices and imagery and appropriation." She explained that students sometimes panic when she shares this board:

> [The images are] the rainbow rain and the wet eyes, the pastel ballerinas, and all that stuff. And I'm scrolling through, and you can see some of their eyes getting wide. And I'm like, "Listen, if you've made stuff like this, or you're excited about making stuff like this... there's nothing wrong with that. You just need to understand why it's in this cliché category and how to get that out of your system so that you make something that's individual to you. If we can Google it and find a whole slew of these things in our Google image search, I hate to break it to you, but your idea is not new."

The concern about cliches did not appear to be rooted in worry about a reader's having seen it many times before. Rachel explained that the cliches were things that she knew her students themselves had seen many times before: she recognized that this work would only amount to mimicry, and wanted them to challenge themselves to go deeper.

Reader as Audience

On the topic of readers, Rachel was adamant in her desire to keep the AP scoring process out of her classroom. Even her own grading processes are purposefully delayed. This was a conscious choice: "I threw away deadlines and grades four years ago," she said, "because it just wasn't working for me. I let AP get into my head." Earning high scores is explicitly not a goal for her course.

> I tell them all the time, I couldn't care any less what you make on that portfolio. I don't care. It doesn't impact me, it doesn't hurt my feelings. I care that you submit, and I care that you're proud of your work. And if you're not proud of your work, it's nobody's fault but your own. So what are you going to do to be proud of what you do by the end of the course?

She explained that she felt that considering these external processes was completely beside the point of creating art: “Why feel like you need to make your portfolio a certain thing,” she asked, “when it ultimately is just about the work that you need to make?”

Structures for Teaching the Sustained Investigation

In spite of Rachel’s focus cultivating each student’s individual voice as an artist, she maintained a number of pedagogical structures—student interviews, a series of assignments to generate ideas, a structure for critiques, and other measures—to ensure that students continued to engage with the process and their work in meaningful ways.

Interviews for course admission. The size of the student body at this school means that it was not always possible for every interested student to be given a space in the AP Studio Art course, but students can indicate their interest by applying with Rachel to be a part of the course beginning relatively early in their high school careers; it is not uncommon for sophomores to enroll. Rachel explained that students begin requesting their following year’s courses in February, and she holds interviews and portfolio reviews shortly after: “they have to bring work, any work, and their sketchbook,” she said. They were asked to describe artwork that they would like to create—“if you were going to make something today, with anything, about anything”—and she said that their answers usually provided a clue as to whether they were ready to take on an AP portfolio. Being able to answer the question at all was a good start, because, as she explained, “they almost always have something where you’re like, ‘oh, I can work with that,’” she said. Most students are admitted to the course.

Early assignments: Trash critique, Pinterest board. When Rachel explained the assignments that lead to the development of the Sustained Investigation, it was notable that she

did not, in these early stages, directly ask students to name possible central ideas for this work. Instead, she invited them to share things—their own past work, images that interested them—and began conversations about ideas from there.

An early AP assignment was the "trash critique" that students had commented on as well. The prompt is simple, she explained: "every person has to bring a piece that they're disappointed in the outcome." During the critique, other students will respond, both in terms of the work's formal qualities and its conceptual content, and the presenting student will be asked if there are any aspects of this work that they would like to revisit or not. Although the critique itself might prove useful to some students, Rachel described this activity as an ice-breaker as much as a source of ideas. They are introducing themselves and their visual interests, and once students have shared unsuccessful work, she said, "the guard is down."

Another early assignment to lay the groundwork for the Sustained Investigation is the creation of a Pinterest board, where each student captures something about his or her artistic interests—she explained, "it could be anything from 'techniques I want to try,' [to] 'images that inspire me.'" They hold another group discussion where the students share and react to one another's boards, and help each other to consider the common threads among selected images:

> You can see right away what the kid is about, and they don't know what they're about. They're like, "I don't know why I'm pinning this stuff, I just love it," and I'm like, "Oh, I totally see it." It's about balance, or you're really into contrast, or you could pick out the one little thing that they're noticing. It could be concept or it could be structural, and then they're like, "Oh yeah, I guess I see that."

Critiques. Rachel's AP class held biweekly critiques of work in progress, no matter the state: sketches would be discussed as readily as a piece that was more defined. She described her role as that of a recorder: she kept an open Word document for each student and explained that "I'm just feverishly typing what they're saying so that they have almost a script or a narrative of

it... Because when they talk about it, they can't remember what they said." Early in the year, this helped students to identify core aspects of their ideas, and later on, the notes give them a foundation for their written statements. In any stage of work, the written records could lead to greater clarity on artistic intent:

> I'm constantly recording for them what we have in the conversation so that they can go back and reflect. And they don't have to use any of it, but it's there for them. And a lot of times they're like, "The more I look at this and start typing my own thing, the more it starts to be more about a different bracket, but I'm still working on the idea."

She explained that at this later point, it became much more important that they could pin down their ideas with more precision. She described the transformation of their sometimes unfocused speaking to a succinct written statement as a filtration process: by the end, she said, students should have a clear "elevator pitch," describing their Sustained Investigation in just a few words.

Student support and feedback. In explaining her interactions with students, both individually and collectively, Rachel explained that she saw her role as to "facilitate the conversation as long as possible," meaning that the more she could get students to describe and articulate their ideas, the clearer they would become. This conversation extended from critique to more informal interactions, and her descriptions of it often returned to three themes: encouraging students to follow their "weird" ideas and inclinations, enabling them to trust themselves and their own processes, and scaffolding reflection.

Embracing the weird. Rachel's students spoke about grappling with worries about "weird" ideas and challenging themselves to produce weird work even if they were nervous to show it to their peers. Rachel noticed this too, commenting that this weirdness was usually an indicator that they were on to something personally significant. She recognized that it was a facet of their work that needed specific encouragement:

> Just encouraging that willingness to just say, "Maybe I want to try it this way instead," is, I think, the biggest part. Because they start to trust that maybe what's in their mind isn't crazy. Which I think a lot of artists grapple with—"Why do I have this idea and nobody else does, and is that weird or is it wrong or... ?" Just trusting that they have abilities that nobody else does.

Building trust. Several times, Rachel returned to the idea that the Sustained Investigation cannot be mapped out in advance. A hallmark of this work, she reasoned, is the experience of not knowing where it might end up. With that in mind, she described a responsibility to instill trust in students—in themselves as artists, and in the creative process:

> They have to trust themselves that it's going to be the way it needs to be. They have to trust that what they make is valid, because it doesn't and shouldn't look like what somebody else is doing. They have to trust that they're going to get what they want out of it, and that's the hard part in the beginning, because nobody trusts anything that's new.

She continued that, she often coaches students to "just make it and see what happens," a stance that was echoed almost verbatim in Jenna's comments about the mindset that she is approaching her work with this year.

Of course, sometimes she might anticipate that a student's idea might not pan out successfully. She reasoned that students must make room for failure, though: she referenced creativity advocate Ken Robinson in explaining that "if you're never prepared to fail, you're never going to come up with anything original." Her emphasis on process, on trying things out and seeing where they lead, is ultimately about this goal of discovering one's own voice and individual approach to artmaking. Early in the year, she is more willing to, in her words, "let them bomb," making work about the general theme of emotions, for example. At that point, she said, "they need to see that it's not working... they need to flop, and they need to dust themselves off and figure out where to go from there." Later in the year, "if they're totally spinning their wheels," she said, "of course I'm going to pull them out of the mud."

> I think, the thing I must say all of the time is, none of that matters. Just make it. Nothing matters. Let's just make it and see what happens, because at least in my demographic of kids, they are so aware of, "how do I make it good enough to do well by the end?" And they are so afraid of it not working sometimes, and if it doesn't work, that means it's doing the right thing, because you have to fail.

Reflection. Within and beyond critiques, Rachel had a habit of listening closely and reflecting key elements of their ideas and processes back to students. It was a cyclical, iterative conversation, and she recognized its complexity. "The way that my students are working," she said, "feels like the way I was working when I started grad school. It's this really introspective thing." Rachel fed that introspection by encouraging students to pause and reflect on their work in progress, and by feeding them questions that make them continually revisit the choices they are making and the ideas they are exploring. Initially, these questions might invite students to consider whether something they just made could be a part of the Sustained Investigation, or whether it was just a single piece that they wanted to pursue that they are now finished exploring. "Some kids know right away," she said. "They're like, 'no, I just wanted to try a relief, work out this idea, and make a print." Other times, though, students will share that there is something about a recent work that continues to interest them, and that they want to spend more time with.

Other times, she would push them to consider whether their selected media and processes connected to the ideas that they hoped to convey. She explained that examining this pairing was "just about the design process and how to work through the creative kinks of making choices."

Sometimes, the act of reflection is about asking students if their work is really about what they think it is about. She found that sometimes they held on to certain ideas when the work itself seemed to be moving in a different direction, and explained that she often had to suggest alternate conceptual ideas: "is it actually about *this*?" In raising the question, the intent is not to

steer students toward new ideas; rather it is to test whether this alternate idea resonates more fully with what it is the student was aiming to do.

The Purpose of the Sustained Investigation

In considering what she hoped would be her students' long-term takeaways from the experience of creating a Sustained Investigation, Rachel paused and said, "I just hope they'll understand humanity, honestly." She explained:

> Really, it's understanding that we all have these struggles that are so multi-faceted and so complex and individual that you can't solve it with just one step.... and I think that with AP they really see and understand everyone else's perspective as being influential on their own, and that they're all connected in one way or another.... so at least for a little bit, I hope they sustain that process of becoming a human, a decent human being is hard. [chuckle] You know? And you have to keep working at it. So production of that is tough work. So be a human being, I hope, is what they get from AP art. [laughter]

Returning to her characterization of the Sustained Investigation as a journey, she was interested in students setting out on this journey, but also understanding that their peers were on their own journeys too, and that as a community they were continually influencing each other.

Chapter Summary

Students here described the Sustained Investigation as the exploration of a central idea or concept and emphasized that this unifying feature must have personal relevance. When considering their own criteria for success in their Sustained Investigations—how they would know when they were satisfied with their work—they spoke in terms of technical mastery of their materials and processes, but also of seeing that they had created work that conveyed a particular feeling. They described the evolution of their own processes and practices as artists, and some students noticed that their central ideas were clarified as the work itself evolved. Some

students also spoke about writing as a tool for expressing and clarifying the ideas of their Sustained Investigations. When considering audiences outside themselves, students here expressed occasional worry that peers and other viewers close to them might think their work was “weird.” They appeared to have fewer concerns that their teacher would feel this way, and described her as a collaborator and sounding board in the development of their work. When describing hallmarks of a good Sustained Investigation that would apply to all students, not just their own work, they said that the Sustained Investigation should be, at its heart, work that makes the artist happy, and that deeply interests him or her. In addition, they felt that the work should have a clear purpose or intent, although students (and their teacher) were divided as to whether the artists should know that purpose at the outset.

Their teacher, Rachel, described the Sustained Investigation in ways that emphasized its ongoing evolution and development. In her view, a successful Sustained Investigation is one that the student has worked on consistently, and has allowed the work to grow and change over time. She highlighted the need to steer students away from cliched or overdone ideas and approaches, mostly out of a concern that they do not allow for the kind of growth that is central to the Sustained Investigation. She put a series of structures in place to guide students in generating ideas that might guide their Sustained Investigations. She also offered ongoing support and feedback meant to help students to follow their own ideas and trust themselves and their creative processes. She built reflection into her practice in implicit and explicit ways, to enable students to continually refine their ideas and processes as they worked. She described the broadest benefits of the Sustained Investigation as this self-knowledge that students would develop of themselves as artists, but also the growth of the classroom community of artists more broadly.

Chapter VIII

FINDINGS: AP READERS

The scale of the AP Studio Art reading can be difficult to process, even when seeing it firsthand. In under two weeks, nearly 150 visual art educators, including AP teachers as well as foundation-level college studio art instructors, view and score about 66,000 portfolios. Most of this work is submitted digitally, but for one section, known as selected works, students still pack and send their five strongest 2-D pieces for evaluation (3-D portfolios do not have this requirement). In a space the size of an airplane hangar, dozens of assistants unpack and lay out this work for scoring, and then quickly re-pack it for return to the students and lay out more work, continuously, for days on end.

Figure 6

The Selected Works Section of an AP Studio Art Reading

In viewing this process in person, it was startling how quiet it is. The scoring process is fast, but it is focused and intense. Readers traverse the aisles, or sit in front of monitors

reviewing images, with rubrics in hand and their undivided attention on the student work. As artists and educators themselves, they have a deep respect for the challenge that students have chosen to undertake, and for their willingness to share it with strangers.

Introduction to the Readers

Four readers participated in this study, discussing their experiences in scoring student Sustained Investigations and their perspectives on the hallmarks of quality in student ideation and investigation. The first, Stephanie, is an AP teacher at a public high school in a mid-Atlantic suburb. Two are college studio art faculty: Lisa teaches photography at a small midwestern college, and Fred teaches ceramics at a small liberal arts school in the south. The last participant, Carl, is currently a dean for a major US art school. All have served as readers for over a decade, some much longer. All have served as table leaders—readers that train teams of other readers—and two have participated on a smaller leadership team overseeing the entire reading process.

In discussing the Sustained Investigation, their roles as artists, educators, and evaluators naturally overlapped and informed one another. In a manner similar to the students and teachers profiled in this study, they offered descriptions and definitions of the Sustained Investigation, and thoughts on the hallmarks of particularly successful ones. They commented on the role that process plays in understanding and navigating the Sustained Investigation. As educators themselves, they also commented extensively on the pedagogical implications of this portion of the portfolio: what they hope students understand and aim for in undertaking this work, but also how they hope teachers would ideally describe the Sustained Investigation to their students and guide them through this process. They also specifically acknowledged the pedagogical challenges inherent in this work of making artistic process and practice transparent for students.

Defining and Describing the Sustained Investigation

Before the more nuanced qualities of the Sustained Investigation could be discussed, some baseline definitions and shared understandings of this portfolio segment needed to be established. This section will describe the defining features of the Sustained Investigation, which were reflected in the comments of all four reader participants. As they described their concepts of the Sustained Investigation, or shared how they would define this section of the portfolio for people who may not be familiar, three primary features were repeatedly referenced: the Sustained Investigation is a body of creative work, this work is connected by an element that goes beyond superficial matching in its visual qualities, and it is work that documents the process of visual research and investigation.

A body of work. All readers expressed the general idea that the Sustained Investigation is a collection of works of art that are developed in relationship with one another. Carl shared that in serving as a table leader and training new readers, he wanted them to know that this portfolio section was about creating:

> a body of work... meaning that this was supposed to be something about an idea that was pursued throughout all of the works and that there needed to be something that linked them visually.

Readers described the presence of some element holding these pieces together, although they used different words to describe this together-ness: in addition to thinking of it as a body of work, some referenced the central, unifying element as a running thread, a big idea, or a theme. The term *theme* in particular was somewhat divisive among readers. Carl felt that the concept of a theme oversimplified the purpose and intent of the Sustained Investigation, alluding to the idea that this unifying component should extend deeper than the subject matter of the work. Fred, on the other hand, found theme to be a useful term, saying that “the word that popped out to me,

was *theme.* And I think it had to have this common thread...that wove through the entire twelve pieces and tied together in some way."

Connected but not matching. The discomfort of many around the notion of a theme related to the idea that the Sustained Investigation should not be a collection of works that merely *match*. Several readers described the unifying factor of the Sustained Investigation as being encapsulated in the title itself: the work represents an investigation of something, rather than repeated depictions of it. In describing this investigative quality, several found it useful to draw distinctions between the Concentration and the Sustained Investigation, and the ways that the structure and intent for this section of the AP portfolio has evolved in recent years. In their view, the Concentration might have reflected the use of a more straightforward theme that they stressed the program is moving away from. Lisa reflected that,

> The word *Concentration* always made me think of that game we played when we were kids where we had to match the two apples and the two oranges... It was more about connectivity based on something simple, whereas Sustained Investigation really does make them think about carrying a lot of thought through a body of work and I hope that the students are starting to feel that. That it isn't just about "I'm going to make 12 pictures of eyeballs," that it's about a continuation of an idea, of a thought.

Even Fred, who was comfortable using the term theme, noted that you need to "work it to death until you've exhausted all the possibilities," meaning it cannot be a surface-level endeavor. Stephanie held a similar view, sharing that when she began as a reader well over a decade ago, "I saw the Concentration as being matchy-matchy and kind of having an overall consistency that was immediately apparent to the reader," but that "now I see that and cringe at it thinking... no, that's not really good art making." The distinction, to her, is that "it may be a strength to make something look cohesive, but cohesive is not necessarily investigative."

In working with other AP teachers and being an active member of the online AP teacher community, Stephanie shared that she has developed an analogy—that of a wagon wheel versus

a tree—to describe the distinctions between the Concentration and the Sustained Investigation, and to help her colleagues visualize the differences:

> Concentration, it's like a wagon wheel. You have a topic in the middle and students work hard to find this topic and they put a lot of pressure on themselves to find the perfect topic because then they have to make 12 pieces around this topic. After each artwork, they return to the topic which is in the center of the wagon wheel. [In] a Sustained Investigation, instead of returning to the topic, you make an artwork and then you say, "Okay, what am I exploring here, what am I investigating, what do I want to investigate further?" So that could be a formal concern, a technique, use [of] materials. It could be an evolution of the idea... so that could look more like a tree branch where you do a couple pieces, you go off on a branch and then you go, well, I really want to return to the previous piece. And it's a matter of not knowing what the end result is, you don't know the path that you're going to take, versus the wagon wheel when you know you're always going to go back to the topic.

Central to the Sustained Investigation, then, is the notion of the evolution of the body of work over time. Stephanie noted that an AP colleague used this term, evolution, as they were in the process of redefining the course and portfolio a few years ago, "and that was really helpful to me, about an investigation evolving, about the changes moving in a direction."

Emphasis on process. Related to Stephanie's idea of not knowing where you might go next with your work, and to Fred's notion of "working an idea to death," all readers touched upon the Sustained Investigation's emphasis on process, which is what enables the work to evolve as desired. All readers described the Sustained Investigation as an endeavor to delve into an idea, to figure something out through the act of making, and also to deliberately document that process of figuring things out, and share that with their audience. Fred noted that "now we're stressing process more," and "that's totally on target," in terms of relating to not only college-level expectations of art students, but the practices of professional artists as well. "The more you grow in the art world," he noted, "the more you understand that the process is equally important, so why not document it as you go?"

In describing this investigation and documentation, Stephanie adopted a term that students might associate with other academic subjects, noting that the Sustained Investigation is "research... it's independently-directed, self-directed research. It's artwork as research."

Hallmarks of Success in the Sustained Investigation

The straightforward descriptions of the defining features of the Sustained Investigation invite the question of success in this endeavor: What are the hallmarks of a successful Sustained Investigation, particularly as it relates to the pursuit of an idea? In the simplest terms, how do readers know when they have a good one? Their answers, as one might expect, drew heavily on the language of the scoring guidelines, but these comments reflected the readers' understanding of what it means or looks like for student artwork to be engaging, for an investigation to have depth, or for a selected idea to be clearly present throughout a body of work. The most common qualities of successful work that readers described in these conversations were originality, a depth or complexity of ideas, a clear visual evolution of ideas, and the effective integration of technique and concept.

Originality. Most readers described successful Sustained Investigations as ones that introduce an element of surprise in the reading process—ones that represent a departure from the norms of what they are accustomed to seeing. Carl described it as work that "looks like something that you just don't see frequently," and that this originality evokes an immediate response:

> Sometimes it initially is, when you see something and for that split second you're like, 'Wow. I wish I would have done that.' Somebody has challenged something, which I think it's kind of exciting.

Fred described this as work that is "out of the box," and also noted its rarity as a defining feature: "it gets harder and harder to find that." This aspect of originality might relate to the idea that is being pursued, or the artistic media and processes with which the student is working.

Depth. Related to originality is the notion of creating work that some readers described as *deep*, which echoes the emphasis on work that goes beyond surface-level matching to reflect the consideration or pursuit of an idea. Carl shared that the "ones that really got interesting and showed the development" were the ones that moved beyond "identifying" the idea and did something more interesting with it:

> ...meaning that it's portraits or it's about horses, [but] when they actually get to a point where it was something that went beyond the object and it was about something a little bit more complex, a little bit more compelling, a little bit more interesting.

Fred also described this compelling or interesting quality as "provocative," saying that sometimes student artworks "weren't necessarily beautiful or pretty, but they were provocative in the way that they were presented, and I guess that'd be another level of deep thinking." Lisa described successful work as not only deep, but also personal: "They had deep thoughts and they had content to their work that was personal and it was researched or it was nuanced because they experienced it."

This quality of depth was also described in terms of its opposite: readers noted that less successful work was often "formulaic," "superficial," or "cliché." Carl shared that his experience of looking at superficial work is that "it could be things that are executed beautifully, but they're really just not about anything. It represents something as far as an object or a person, but they're really not about anything." Lisa echoed this comment, saying that in these cases, "you just never get to anything more." Fred thought of this kind of work as "trite," saying that "we get a lot of romance and love too, in high school, but... if you just see hearts then it's not too deep."

Stephanie described this work similarly, saying that it works with "all the kind of clichés and emotional language that high school students gravitate towards, or that they live in."

In the cases where the work lacks depth, Lisa noted that it sometimes feels as if they have chosen an idea that is too big or that is not personally relevant at all, arguing that in these cases, the work falls short because "they don't really know what they're talking about. I think that really degrades the quality of the work when they just don't understand what they're trying to say, either because they've never lived it or they haven't researched it." In other cases, though, she wondered whether the lack of depth might come from having an idea that does not work as a focus of investigation. She remarked that students might write that their Concentration is "yellow," or it is about "line," and in some of these cases it is not clear what it is about a color or an element the student was interested in. "They don't actually dig deep enough to get to any content," she said, "but I think that's easy to see. I think it's harder to see when it could be, and it isn't."

In the same way that Carl noted that work that is "portraits, or it's about horses," can still be interesting and compelling, Lisa said that ideas that seem trite can still be executed in original ways; in other words, depth and originality do not necessarily go hand-in-hand:

> I want new readers to recognize that even though we see the same content over and over again, it doesn't mean that it isn't as valid each time. We get a lot of portfolios in the last couple of years that are about... some kind of trauma that the student has gone through, and just because you see yet another portfolio that says that their work is about depression, that it doesn't mean that it's trite or it's a cliché. If they're creating work about how they're scared about the future of our country, that is not like, "ugh, here's another one of this." Do not pigeonhole that. The same way that I go, "oh, here's another one that's about emotions," but even if it is about emotions and it is a cliché that doesn't mean that they're not going to do it really well and they're not going to give you something new. It's possible. That's always really surprisingly, wonderfully shocking, when you get something that's a little bit trite and they do it really, really well.

Visual evidence of evolution. The originality and depth referenced above both relate to the visual evidence of the ongoing evolution or investigation of an idea. In these cases, said Carl,

> [W]hat they had pursued, kind of ignited the creation.... those times when you see that there's a question there, and that question really doesn't have an answer to it. Even better, it has just led to another question, and that question has led to something else. When you start to see a body of work that has that type of progression and development in it, I think it is really exciting. I look for something where it showed that the student had actually learned something from the making.

Carl reported that visually, this evolution might be reflected in "a little uneven-ness" in the work overall: "that was something that told me that, yeah, they maybe struggled a little bit with something, and I think that struggling is an opportunity to learn something." Lisa thought in similar terms and referred to a body of work as "a living document, when the work is continuing to evolve." Fred and Stephanie also referenced visual indicators of growth over time as evidence of a successful Sustained Investigation.

If the work lacked this sense of evolution, it was sometimes described as formulaic: it was often repetitive, executing the same idea and approach over and over in a product-driven way. Fred noted that sometimes, "it seems like their teacher has given them this formula, that they're going to get a good grade if they do it this way or that way, or [using] certain words." Carl echoed this sentiment, saying that in the work that he would describe as formulaic, "I think there is a little bit more of an emphasis on the product and not the idea behind there."

Effective merging of technique and concept. In describing successful Sustained Investigations, readers often commented on the balance of technical skills with evidence of conceptual content—the true pursuit of an idea. In the strongest examples, they noted, both of these halves are not only present, but they reinforce one another, and work together to contribute to the ongoing growth and evolution of the body of work as a whole.

In order to better envision the hallmarks of a successful Sustained Investigation, I asked each of the readers to share an example of a particularly memorable one. Remarkably, Lisa and Carl each chose to talk about the same portfolio—a mixed-media example from 2015. The student was living in Turkey and started photographing friends, neighbors, and community members serving and drinking tea, considering the role of this ritual in the daily life and social norms of the region. As the project expanded the student began printing tiny editions of the photographs on filter paper and assembling tea bags made from these prints. These became components of a sculpture as the student arranged and hung the tea bags from a tea serving tray. Recalling this work, Lisa said,

> There was one where they made images on tea bags. They printed on them and then they put them back together and put the tea back in and they were... this complete thing. It was such a wonderful way to use something that we all know what that is, and especially if it is part of your culture... and using it in a way that transformed it into something that transcended a tea bag, which is such a banal thing, and made it into something that was so engaging and so cool. As I remember, there were process images where they were hanging and kind of sculptural too. To me, that was one of the most exciting portfolios I had seen in a long time, and really the concept... was not the most sophisticated I'd ever seen, it was not the most unique I have ever seen, but it was done so beautifully and so heartfully that it was such a lasting piece.

Carl said this Sustained Investigation was "just brilliant because it's the student really immersing themselves in an idea. They were living it, they were consuming, it was just all around them." This element of balance between technical and conceptual strength was echoed in other examples. Carl recalled another standout portfolio that he had recently used to train readers:

> [T]he student was dealing with rites of passage, and the student was talking about moving on to college. It started with the boxes, and they were using that as this kind of metaphor because they were going to be packing up all of their things and moving to college. They started taking those boxes, and they started creating these scenes from their life. I just thought that was really brilliant because they were starting to kind of reflect, and they were understanding how special that time was, because once they went off to college, once they come back home, things are going to be different. And you want for that student to have that level of maturity and appreciation of, "Hey, I need to kind of capture this."

Fred described a 3D portfolio that focused on fashion design and that similarly, thoughtfully merged media and idea. “It was a series of dresses, he remembered, “that was made from trash. And as I recall, it was tied into environmental issues and recycling. I thought [it] was very thoughtful and purposeful and then also demonstrated some artistic ability as well.”

Stephanie spoke about a Sustained Investigation that became famous at the 2019 reading, where it was lovingly termed “the God portfolio,” referencing the student’s stated intent to visually convey the presence of God in nature. She produced a series of drawings and enormous, wall-sized landscape paintings using a range of media, including traditional art materials as well as inks made with dirt and other materials from nature. At one point, she collected and set fire to a small bush, photographing the process (and quite literally referencing the biblical image of a burning bush), and then made a drawing with the charred sticks that remained. Of this work, Stephanie said,

> I mean the scale alone. So there’s a big risk... an attempt, and a quite successful attempt, at a large-scale piece. A use of material that was sophisticated in a way that it wasn’t that beginner developmental level... So it was a use of materials in experimental ways with... I think she used water, and I think she used a ground charcoal and made it liquid. And then, to burn a bush... her materials were so well-synthesized [to her idea], and that was just such a “wow” moment when we came across that.

In many of these examples, it may seem that while the technical and conceptual components were equally strong, the idea took the lead in giving shape to the Sustained Investigation. In highlighting another exceptional portfolio, Carl sought to make the point that ideas that are more formal in nature are still ideas, and can form the basis of a successful body of work:

> There was a stunning portfolio of these 3D sculptures that were all made from Styrofoam cups. There was just something about that that I thought was incredibly sophisticated on the formal ideas that were being pursued, and that it was a way of illustrating that, hey, that’s a valid way to work as well. It wasn’t just kind of a superficial thing, where it’s about texture... it was really challenging the ideas of balance and how it

> can be achieved in these three-dimensional forms that were just—there was just something aesthetically, they were just absolutely beautiful.

When describing the reading process, participants noted that challenges arise when a Sustained Investigation excels in only one of these areas—technique *or* idea. Fred recalled that, "those were some of the battles, like we would have to say, 'well, you know, it's technically superior but where's the thinking going on?'" He noted that the reverse could also be possible:

> Sometimes you would be tempted... It wasn't technically superior at all, but the concept or the idea was so good, and you could feel that they had really thought through each step of the portfolio.

Lisa reiterated this tension between tendencies to recognize technical merit versus conceptual content as a primary marker of success, explaining that,

> I have always been one to reward conceptual thinking, at least as high as technical skill. There are other readers who really settle on, if that is technically amazing, then it doesn't matter if they don't have anything to say.

She mentioned that recent revisions to the rubrics for the Sustained Investigation will ensure that these perspectives "balance out" in the reading, because they are both central components of success.

Relationship of Ideas to Writing

Of course, the Sustained Investigation is not represented solely by the works of art that students choose to submit; they also prepare short written statements describing their idea and its investigation. The readers considered the utility of the written statement from two viewpoints: it can be a tool for the artist to clarify his or her intention for the work, and it is also a tool for the reader to understand what the artist was thinking about as it was created.

Writing to assist an audience. Viewed through one lens, student writing is important because it gives one's audience—in this case, the readers—an opportunity to learn more about aspects of the artist's ideas and process that might not be immediately apparent visually. The

reading of these statements inform the viewing of the work. Fred noted that “It helps the reader, the scorer, to understand a little bit more about what they're looking for.”

Several readers commented that in many cases, the writing lends insight that leads to a greater understanding of the body of work. In truly memorable examples, it introduces a scope of thought that may have been unanticipated upon a first viewing of the work. Carl described this experience:

> It’s like, “I was working on this... I was doing these portraits, and all of a sudden I became interested in gender roles, and traditional gender roles versus what contemporary roles would be.” And all of a sudden... I would be like, okay, you know what? Even though I’m looking at a portrait of somebody, they’re really thinking about beyond just the facade of really what makes up that person and what maybe has happened prior to that split second that they were capturing that image, and maybe what could be happening in the future related to who that person is. I get really excited when I see things like that or read things like that.

Writing to assist the creative process. Readers noted that writing can also be a tool for students themselves, to clarify their ideas as the work develops. Both Carl and Fred spoke of the benefits of short, incremental, but ongoing writing as a part of documenting one’s process. Carl reasoned that “Even if it’s a... It’s not even a sentence, even just a phrase of, "This week, what did you think about?,” that that can be helpful in strengthening and clarifying student ideas while the portfolio is still in progress. “Just tell me something you thought about.” Fred shared similar advice, noting that something as small as a single word can help students to reflect on and articulate the ideas that they are pursuing.

Limitations in student writing. Whether writing has been developed all at once or over time, the readers noted that often, the statements that students submit with their work do not do much to illuminate readers’ understanding of the Sustained Investigation. “The text that we get,” said Lisa, “is usually grossly inadequate at telling us what they’re doing or what they’re thinking.” She wondered if this might be because of a lack of confidence in their own writing, or

perhaps because students are being prompted to write in a way that is not helpful. “Often times, you don’t understand them in the way that they verbalize,” she reflected, “but you can get to see [their ideas] in the way that they create.” Carl agreed, saying that “there were so many times that... you could tell that it was just the words that were put into a box, just to kind of check off a box.”

A related concern was a noted disconnect between information that was presented by students visually versus in writing; sometimes the two appeared to have very little to do with one another. Carl commented on these cases, saying that “I think sometimes they might revert back to what they feel is expected from them, as opposed to what truly is something that they would like to say about the work.” He said that sometimes in these cases, “you would...look at the visual work and it’s like, ‘actually, I think they’re pursuing something a little bit deeper than that.’” Lisa acknowledged the same issue differently, saying that students sometimes seem to just supply “definitions” of artistic terms in their statements, and that she wished that they would “tell me why you’re making.” She went on, “I think [students] don’t think that that’s relevant because it’s a test about design, or it’s a test about drawing, and so they leave out the good stuff.”

Pedagogy and Process

Readers acknowledged the pedagogical challenges in helping students to navigate the Sustained Investigation, and offered some thoughts on what this process might ideally look like in AP classrooms—especially highlighting the role of evolution and personal meaning in the definition of this work. This advice was informed by their roles not only as readers but as artists and teachers.

Grappling with pedagogical shifts. As readers described the defining qualities of the Sustained Investigation—particularly its focus on evolution and process documentation, and its

emphasis on pairing technical rigor with conceptual inquiry—many paused to acknowledge the elephant in the room: even in their own artistic training, even in graduate school, many were not expected to work this way. Stephanie admitted that, "the way that so many us of were taught in college or art school was...I wouldn't say [ideas] were unimportant, but they weren't always important." This emphasis on the conceptual, then, could be daunting to approach as a teacher, if the teacher him- or herself was not taught that way. Carl touched on the same theme:

> A lot of us, when we first start teaching, we start teaching the way we were taught. And I think there's a lot of us who were educated in the twentieth century still kind of try to use a twentieth century model, which doesn't really fit for the twenty-first century.

Fred's comments echoed this point, noting that, "my art training was highly geared toward technical," with a reigning philosophy along the lines of, "first learn how to draw, and then you can express yourself." He felt that the approach the readers now advocate for is almost the opposite: "I think now the shift is that if you have a good idea and a good heart and a good plan, eventually if you work hard enough your technical skills will catch up to it." Carl reasoned that teachers might imagine the tension between technique and concept to be more extreme than it really is; they were both always intertwined:

> Sometimes we have these conversations with my fellow educators, especially in foundation studies, they're like, "is it about the formal resolution of it or is it about the concept?" And it's never about one or the other, it's kind of about both. Or the really good work is. There always seems to be these two different camps, and it's like no, it's really great ideas that are executed really, really well, in a thoughtful, purposeful way.

Working your way into ideas. Interestingly enough, in order for work to evolve in a conceptually rigorous way, the readers on the whole did not believe that students should focus too much on having a clearly defined idea at the outset. In their experience, the act of making leads to the clarification of the idea. The requirement to define an idea up front, before creating, can place undue pressure on students and their processes.

Stephanie shared an observation that AP students—and often teachers, too—are often convinced that they need to clarify their ideas immediately, and that "it's gotta be this profound thing." Lisa expanded on this sentiment, sharing that her beginning college students often think that "conceptual thinking has to be dark and angsty, and that there can't be joy if it's going to be conceptual."

When thinking about the development of ideas, Fred contrasted his own process to that of his students:

> I don't have to have a full-blown idea to get started, but often students feel like they have to have more of a full-blown idea, like, "I gotta work this out." No, trust yourself that you're going to be able to create work as you go. So I think it has to do with the conviction of certain things, whether it is recycling or peace or guns.

Most of the readers spoke about the value of creating work before becoming concerned with ideas. Carl expressed a hope that AP teachers will not simply demand that students "'Tell me what your Sustained Investigation is,'" but instead "actually giving them some opportunities really early on to just start making, and letting that making almost organically lead them to maybe an idea that they would like to pursue." Stephanie's AP classroom follows almost exactly this procedure; at the beginning of the year, she recalled saying to her students,

> "Okay, let's just start at day one. You need to make some art. You need to enjoy making art." And then just talking to them about, don't worry about all these other things. I've got your back here. We will introduce them a little bit at a time, we'll add them back in."

Evolution. As an extension to the idea of beginning before ideas are solidified, all readers spoke enthusiastically and at length about the idea of evolution—that the Sustained Investigation is something that is meant to change and grow over time. Carl said, "it's kind of like, build it, they will come. If you focus on the process, the product will come, it just naturally will." Lisa described this evolution as "the idea [that] you're taking what you know, and it's

growing and it's building, and it's becoming something bigger and better and more informed." If a student began with an interest in sunflowers, for example, she hopes that:

> Instead of just twelve or fifteen drawings of sunflowers, that we figure out why we like the sunflower and why the sunflower speaks to us and we learn about a sunflower, and that grows. I just learned something about sunflowers: when they can't face the sun, they face each other. It was just a little Instagram kind of a meme but... that's amazing and I had no idea. [If] someone would learn that, then maybe their next drawing would have something to do with that, so that they keep growing and learning through the process.

She referred to work made this way as "a living document," and said that working in this way "gives them so much more to create about." Stephanie also acknowledged this need for students to allow the process to transform their work. "In some ways," she reasoned, "it just feels like structuring curiosity." In her own AP classroom, she said that she explains that students need to pick a direction, and "we don't know where it's going to end up, [and] that's okay." She explained that navigating this with students requires "a lot of reassuring all along the way."

Most of the readers related this foundational belief in process to their own work as artists; they know from experience that the process of making art can lead to new and interesting ideas and discoveries that could not have been planned. Fred acknowledged that "it hasn't happened overnight, I've been doing this for a while," but that:

> For me it's been such a freeing experience... to have confidence in the fact that you start out with an idea and then just you kinda slip into this Jackson Pollock kind of a subconscious thing and let it go where it goes.

He worried that his students do not get to experience this enough because "they don't trust themselves." Carl shared a similar concern, about his college students worrying that their work was off-track when it did not turn out the way they had originally envisioned.

> For me, the exciting thing is when it doesn't turn out exactly how I thought it would. And my students are like, "No, but...it doesn't look the way I thought it was going to look." And I'm going, "Isn't that awesome? Because you know what, if everything turned out the exact same way that we thought it would, how boring would that be?"

Personally relevant work. At some point during our conversations, all readers touched on the importance of students having a personal investment in their work and process. Carl described the greatest challenge to AP students as, "getting past making things to please others, as opposed to making things that they really believed in." He worried that his college students become too fixated on grades as a motivator:

> The very first thing [students] can do is stop worrying about getting an A. That's your starting point. Let's start talking about making things that are really interesting that align with whatever the assignment is.

Lisa agreed that students should choose to create work about "what matters to them, whether it's something personal or something global," and that they should "take a personal stake in it." Sometimes students choose subject matter or themes that seem interesting, but that are moved from students' own experiences, she explained, and sometimes the work can be compromised as a result:

> A student can come and say "I'm going to do a project about depression." But if they're not depressed or haven't been around anyone who's depressed, it's going to be like they learned about it by reading it in a book instead of living it by experiencing it or going through it. There's a big disconnect there, but I think that's one of the keys too to Sustained Investigation, is having an investment in whatever the subject is... Even if the Concentration is circles, really digging into why a circle is important, and that allows any of it to be elevated.

Fred shared that one of his AP reader colleagues takes a more specific approach when helping students to identify themes and ideas that they might have this personal stake in: "one of his points is," what are you angry about?," Fred remembered. "So he works from, what really gets you worked up? And then he gets all worked up too, which is nice."

While the readers all spoke about the strength of work that is personally driven, this product-focused outcome is not the only reason to pursue artmaking in this way. Stephanie explained that the Sustained Investigation process can let students come to know the power of

their own artistic voices. “I hope they realize that they have stories to tell,” she said, “and that their stories are valued, and were valued in this context.”

Chapter Summary

Readers defined the Sustained Investigation as a body of work where the individual pieces relate to one another but do not necessarily “match” visually. They explained that this work is unified by an emphasis on process—specifically the process of exploring the idea that guides it. They described successful Sustained Investigations as having qualities of originality, depth, and visual evidence of evolution in the relationship of ideas and techniques. They acknowledged writing as central to idea definition and highlighted that students’ writing could naturally assist readers in interpreting their work in depth; some also expressed the hope that writing could be a tool for students to understand their own work better. Readers spoke to the challenges of teaching the Sustained Investigation and acknowledged that this portfolio component presents likely shifts from the ways teachers themselves were taught. They spoke about encouraging evolution and exploration—of both ideas and materials—in Sustained Investigations, and of the importance of enabling this work to be personally meaningful. The following chapter will consider the cases presented in the five chapter of findings, including the private school, parochial school, arts magnet school, public school, and readers, in relation to one another in order to consider cross-case themes and ideas in participant commentary.

Chapter IX

DISCUSSION

The previous chapters examined the experiences of AP teachers and students across four school sites, as well as AP readers, in defining, describing, and assigning meaning or value to the Sustained Investigation portion of the AP Studio Art portfolio. Their comments highlighted the range of ways in which creative ideas and investigation might be conceptualized and pursued, and the influence and overlap of criteria for success among each participant type.

In this chapter, cross-case findings will be synthesized and discussed in the context of literature on contemporary artistic practice, art education pedagogy, and adolescent artistic development and artmaking. These findings will be considered according to three overlapping areas of focus. First, participant definitions of ideas will be examined, with a consideration of not only the range of ways in which ideas might be conceptualized, but the possibility of the simultaneity of multiple ideas, and an acknowledgement of the emergent and ever-evolving nature of ideas. Next, cross-case comments on the relationship of meaning to idea will be examined, with particular consideration of the personally-relevant nature of meaningful ideas, and the observation that meaning often emerges and evolves as ideas themselves do. Finally, participant data will be revisited to explore the range of ways that they describe success as it relates to idea and meaning. These notions of success will be examined as they are defined by the student artists themselves, as well as teachers and readers.

Ideas

The comments of teachers, students, and readers revealed that the broad umbrella term of *idea* may describe a wide range of intentions for students' work and processes, and that students might often negotiate more than one idea or intention at a time, as ideas may serve different, and often overlapping functions. In addition, participants indicated that ideas are rarely static, and that students' intentions for their work often naturally change and evolve over time.

Naming Ideas and Intentions

In this discussion, the notion of an idea may apply to both the form and the meaning of a work of art—both what it *is* and what it is *about*. Respondents described ideas in a range of terms, and furthermore, students' Sustained Investigations often represented the intersection of multiple ideas or intentions within the same body of work. Regardless of the ways that these ideas were conceptualized, participants agreed that ideas could also be defined by their function as the connective quality that is carried throughout a body of work.

Identifying ideas. Across all school sites, students approached their ideas from a wide range of perspectives or starting points. They identified ideas in terms of observable subject matter, qualities of relationships, personal experience, social or political commentary, and the subconscious, among other frames. Some students could encapsulate their ideas in a single word ("architecture;" "windows;" "skin"), while others required a lengthier description, alluding to a particular quality they were aiming for ("photos only I could take") to communicate their intent.

It is notable that student approaches toward describing their ideas did not appear to be a reflection of a particular cognitive culture or set of shared understandings at their school site (Efland, 2002). There were no assumptions within a given school site that an idea must begin

with an abstract concept, or an essential question (Wiggins & McTighe, 2005; Walker, 2004, 2006) as a starting point. Even students who had worked side-by-side all year often described their ideas in strikingly different terms, orienting themselves to the concept of an idea in wide-ranging ways. At the private school, James identified a concrete, observable subject—skin—as his idea, while Vanessa explored ways that social or political concepts could be represented symbolically through fashion. Meanwhile, Meghan sought to represent qualities of personal relationships: not exactly observable subject matter, not a symbol or visual metaphor, but a lived and felt experience. This range of subjects and entry points for creative work is reflective of the range of sources of influence that often inform the ideation and development of student art, and reinforces the acknowledgement in the literature on adolescent artmaking that students are not often hindered by lack of ideas to inform their work: Kahn (2012) identified the influence of particular relationships (peers, family, domain-specific role models), interests, and cultures in which they participate as being influential on the development of ideas and meaning in their work. Similarly, Hafeli (2002) highlighted that adolescent artists might develop their content from a range of sources; they might opt to focus on the formal and technical aspects of artmaking or record a subject from observation, but they might just as readily build meaning through the construction of real or imagined narratives, the representation of feelings, or the development of personal symbolism. Across site, students and teachers embraced the notion that ideas can emerge from anywhere, and can be approached in a range of ways.

Simultaneity of multiple ideas. As the twelve students elaborated in describing their ideas, the presence of these wide-ranging sources of influence became more apparent. The words or phrases they initially shared as their core ideas often did not address the fullness of their intentions for their work, as their Sustained Investigations often represented the intersection or

interconnection of multiple ideas and goals. In the cases of students working with observable subject matter, there was very often something *about* that subject matter that the student artist was interested in exploring or highlighting. Valery documented architecture, but she had a sub-goal of finding examples of stark visual contrast. She therefore was was using a particular subject matter as a vehicle for a formal exploration. Similarly, Sofia's stated focus for her Sustained Investigation was windows, but she sought to examine the ways that windows reflected and represented the broader neighborhoods in which they were found. James described his topic as skin, but as he spoke, this broadened to an exploration of the kinds of things people do to their skin, and then to an interest in juxtaposing skin treatments like suntanning and tattooing. In these cases, subject matter became a lens for telling stories or raising questions. With this layering of intention in mind, some more straightforward ideas are revealed to reflect an added degree of complexity.

Sometimes this complexity was addressed through the purposeful use of surprising juxtapositions. Vanessa contrasted representations of two political parties on a single work, and further juxtaposed social commentary on the unexpected forms of handbags and dresses—gluing needles onto the side of one, for example. Jenna documented the nightmares of her friends and family, but then presented these images in a surprising format: a children's book that nobody would likely ever actually read to a child.

In other cases, students paired broader concepts, like home or feminism, with their own specific and personal associations, narratives, and emotions related to those concepts. In doing so, they represented not just the idea, but a particular stance on the idea. Haley, for example, explained that "I'm against the idea that women feel like they have to be something crazy

different than what they are," in how they represent themselves online, and she wanted that to be evident in her work.

In juxtaposing imagery, or providing personal interpretations of broader conceptual themes, some students took an interesting foray into what has been described in this research as postmodern pedagogy. Without framing it as such, they experimented with what Gude (2007) termed "principles of possibility," including forming self, investigating community themes, and deconstructing culture. It relates, too, to Barrett's (2006) thinking in a similar vein, highlighting artistic practices of hybridizing, mixing media, and mixing codes, as well as Duncum's (2010) principles for visual culture education, examining power, ideology, and multimodality, among other concepts. To Gude, such principles were catalysts for artmaking that is not driven primarily by formal concerns, but several study participants legitimized formal ideas as well. Relatedly, Carl the reader addressed the validity of formal ideas *as* ideas, and students echoed this in their comments. Although none of the students addressed their ideas primarily in terms of formal concerns, several spoke of developing ideas with media and processes in mind, narrowing down these types of preferences at the same time that they negotiated conceptual possibilities. As Olivia worked toward developing her ideas on the concept of home, for example, she knew from the beginning that she wanted to work with fabric and wanted to make abstract sculptures. In describing the overlapping awareness and pursuit of multiple intentions for their work, students indirectly placed themselves in the company of professional artists. In describing the work of artists, Wollheim (2015) discussed this simultaneity of intention, which might be reflected in a balance of formal and conceptual concerns, and also in the balance of working in more planned ways in some aspects of work, while working intuitively in others. The convergence of these ideas and goals is often what gives the work its meaning.

Barrett (2006, 2011), citing Danto (1981) discussed the meaning of works of art—their inherent "about-ness"—as the intersection of deliberate decision-making and awareness of the variety of factors that make up a work of art: its form, subject matter or content, medium, and contexts. The notion of *idea* under discussion here in relation to student art is being considered in the same way that Barrett considered *meaning*: not as an individual component of a work but as a quality embedded in all aspects of it. While students could isolate and articulate their work's core idea or its about-ness, they also naturally spoke of their ideas in terms of this intersection of intentions.

Ideas as connectors in bodies of work. In the case of the Sustained Investigation, idea and about-ness is further explored (or complicated) as students examine what it means or looks like to extend this idea across several works. It also brings new questions and complications to the role of subject matter, medium, form, and/or context in informing or reflecting ideas. To what extent must one or all of these components remain consistent across a body of work? Which aspects can be more fluid, but allow the core idea to remain?

Students, teachers, and readers alike agreed that in order for a number of pieces to be received and understood as a true body of work, the focus of the investigation—the idea—needed to be visually evident in each work of art. Jenna, the student, spoke about a balance between breadth and specificity in the ways that this investigation was pursued: the idea guiding a body of work should be "specific enough to be unique, but broad enough [that] you can make something big out of it." Several other respondents, most notably readers, described a similar balance, which Mitch thought of as "unity and variety." To him, a Sustained Investigation should be clearly visually cohesive, but not repetitive; different pieces should exhibit distinctly different approaches to investigating the idea of interest. Carl agreed that there should be clear visual links

among the works in the Sustained Investigation. Mitch's students at the magnet school noted this need for continuity as well, but expressed that this occasionally felt like a hindrance: they did not feel as free to explore a wide range of media and processes, for example, out of a concern that it would cause an overall inconsistency in the body of work. Some readers highlighted the difference between a body of work that is visually cohesive and one that simply matches, representing an overall sameness with no evident exploration or experimentation. Stephanie referred to this as "matchy-matchy" and admitted to having thought in her earlier years of teaching that this was the goal of the Sustained Investigation, but that "now I see that and cringe." In similar terms, Rachel expressed the feeling that visual continuity was a red flag, a marker of a lack of investigation. When Haley, a new student who had completed an AP portfolio at another school, came to her with a series of interesting but visually similar paintings, Rachel saw this sameness as a weakness. She reasoned that some form of continuity or voice will always be present, as the entire body of work was created by the same artist. Beyond that, she felt that students should not hinder themselves by trying to make matching or visually cohesive work. She cited Kara Walker as an example of an artist whose work varies widely in terms of media and process, but whose core themes and ideas for visual investigation are consistent and undeniable.

Rachel was not the only teacher to turn towards artist examples as a tool for illustrating the range of ways in which a body of work may be approached, and for helping students to notice ideas as the connective tissue that unite a body of work. The notion of a body of work (especially for those who have never created one) and this tightrope of related work that does not match, was a complex aspect of idea-definition. Teachers across all four school sites used examples of contemporary bodies of work, ranging from Jennifer Bartlett drawings to Do Ho

Suh sculptures to Kehinde Wiley paintings, to emphasize the ways that artists establish their own visual language, and then experiment within those self-defined structures, as they explore and examine ideas of interest. These examples were never shared with the intention that students would emulate such work. In Mitch's case, he described doing artist research and sharing examples with students so that they would not inadvertently make something that could be seen as derivative of this existing work. On the whole, these examples were presented to better enable students to consider the range of ways in which an idea might be pursued visually.

In providing these examples and encouraging students to learn from and interact with artists in the broader sphere, educators were enabling students to work in the manner of professional artists, who have often described their work and processes as being in conversation with or response to the work of other artists. Published interviews with artists are littered with such references; as noted in the literature review, Julian Schnabel began painting on plates after seeing sculptures by Gaudi, Romare Bearden related his work to Byzantine paintings, and Helen Frankenthaler responded to Pollock in her work (Stiles & Selz, 2011; Tomkins, 2008;). In looking to professional examples, students placed themselves, too, in this larger community of artists, understanding their work in relation to others.

Evolution of Ideas

Participants described the ways in which the ideas at the heart of Sustained Investigations naturally evolved as the work progressed. This evolution occurred when students changed their minds and abandoned ideas in part or in whole, as well as when they selected aspects of earlier artwork to elaborate on or develop further. Students, teachers, and readers alike all described processes of creating works of art before an idea was fully clarified, and of consciously allowing both individual pieces and the body of work as a whole to evolve as an ongoing, ever-deepening

visual investigation. Participant descriptions of depth and originality of concepts were often linked to depth of exploration that the student artist had pursued.

Changing one's mind. The act of changing course and abandoning ideas, especially early ones, was so common among students that it might be thought of as a natural stage in the Sustained Investigation process. Students especially described this as a hallmark of their early stages of work. Valery adjusted her idea to focus on architecture rather than gentrification, while other students shifted gears entirely: Jenna let go of an idea about exaggerating the scale of things that are over-emphasized in modern society, while Paige decided not to pursue her idea of representing fairy tales in modern settings. Several students described this shift as not only acceptable, but often necessary and encouraged. Several teachers acknowledged the inevitability of changing course, noting that it often led to stronger work, but Sandra also shared a concern that students who abandon ideas too quickly might be "dismissive," and that "if students continue to explore, something more enduring could emerge." Once again, students placed themselves in the company of their professional counterparts in allowing for these shifts. This propensity for changing one's mind in order to pursue new ideas was noted by Mace (1997) and Mace and Ward (2002) as they interviewed working artists about their problem-finding processes, and they identified this practice as an often-essential element of identifying ideas worth pursuing. Abandoning ideas is often less about giving up than it is about clarifying one's motivations and intentions as an artist, and most participants understood and embraced this aspect of artmaking.

Starting with existing work. Several students drew on this evolutionary nature of ideas in a very concrete way, by using past work as a springboard for their Sustained Investigations. Notably, this happened with all three students at the private school: James began with a

photograph that he had taken the previous summer, and Meghan revisited an assignment from the previous year that she found especially compelling. Vanessa had sculpted a large-scale shoe for an earlier project, which led to an interest in designing shoes for her Sustained Investigation; this later evolved into other fashion-related pieces. At the parochial school, Valery described allowing her architecture-focused Sustained Investigation to form around photos she had taken while traveling the previous summer. In all of these cases, teachers did not mention a formal process of having students review former work to look for ideas, but the students seemed to intuit the value of doing so—of beginning with *something* and finding new ways to build from there. This once again resonates with the research of Mace and Ward (2002) on artistic practice and problem definition: they cited artists' own existing work and processes as one of a handful of sources that artists draw upon when defining new ideas for pursuit in their work.

Beginning without a fully formed idea. Another often-shared approach was for students to simply begin creating, with perhaps an initial inclination or vague idea of intent, but nothing that could yet be clearly articulated. This propensity to just dive right in was most pronounced at the public school, where Michelle described her initial process as "attacking a central idea" by "experimenting with [that] central idea," seeing which aspects of the nascent idea were most interesting to her. As Jenna worked her way into her new Sustained Investigation idea, she described one concept that might not pan out but reasoned that "I'll never know if I don't make it, so I'm just going to make it and see what happens." Her advice to other students was "you just have to work through it naturally and the idea will come to you if it's not here yet." Their teacher, Rachel, spoke quite a bit about this approach as well, and she believed adamantly that, "all that matters is that you make stuff, and you keep making stuff," and the ideas would take care of themselves. This was occasionally echoed in other sites as well: at the parochial school,

for example, Gabriela talked about beginning work on her ‘zine without a clear plan, and that “by the fifth page I had a really set-in-stone idea” for how to approach the ‘zine as a whole. At the magnet school, Paige recalled that out of frustration with her initial idea, she gave herself space to “just paint whatever I want,” and the resulting painting gave her the idea about the relationship between art, artist, and viewer that became the focus of her work.

The readers also addressed this element of trust—referring to trust in one’s self and one’s process—as a foundational element of the development of the Sustained Investigation. Lisa referred to this body of work as a “living document,” and Stephanie explained that with her own students, she reassures them that at the outset, “we don’t know where it’s going to end up, and that’s okay.” As noted in the literature review, this is exceedingly common in professional artists’ practices as well; Tomkins (2008, p. 44) quoted Cindy Sherman as saying “I don’t know what I’m trying to say until it’s almost done.” Similarly, Francis Bacon discussed that he starts his work with a vague idea “that completely evaporates” as he works (Peppiatt, 2012, p. 31), and Ann Hamilton acknowledged the creative process as a gradual unfolding of ideas and intentions: “you work from what you know to what you don’t know” (2009, p. 68). Beardsley (1965, p. 295), in discussing artistic intention, reasoned that artists often are not able to approach the declaration of intention for their work in a broad sense, but rather this intention evolves with the work, as a series of smaller decisions. “The main question,” he wrote, “is simply, what do I do next?”

Students seemed to express an understanding of this evolving, iterative nature of idea-definition in an almost intuitive way, and they spoke readily about the ways that their ideas clarified themselves and changed course as they worked. Readers noted this as a hallmark of investigation as well, and commented that the notion of a “great” idea, especially at the outset of

the process, might be overrated. Stephanie worried that students limited themselves before they even started, thinking that "it's gotta be this profound thing," and Fred talked about not needing "full-blown" ideas in order to begin working, acknowledging that students often felt otherwise. "Trust yourself," he advised. "You're going to be able to create work as you go." Carl shared similar comments, advocating for "giving them some opportunities really early on to just start making, and letting that making almost organically lead them to maybe an idea that they would like to pursue." Stephanie said that she begins the process with her students in a similar way, saying to them "let's just start at day one. You need to make some art. You need to enjoy making art. Don't worry about all these other things."

In allowing the content, form, and meaning of their work to remain flexible (Efland, 2004), and in actively reflecting on and responding to their work as it developed, students experienced the Sustained Investigation as a process-event, where creation is the viewed as the interrelationship of conscious and unconscious ideas, actions, and intentions (Richardson & Walker, 2011). It represents a delicate balance between intention and "not-knowing" acknowledging that periods of flux and uncertainty do not represent a lack of idea or meaning, but are an "active space" where idea and meaning may be created (Cocker, 2013; Fortnum, 2013). Formal art education experiences, traditionally assignment-driven, often leave little room for this kind of ambiguity. It is possible that many AP students experience these aspects of investigation for the first time while completing their Sustained Investigations. In an educational environment that often favors certainty and decisiveness, it can be challenging to embrace not-knowing as a norm, and to prioritize exploration and risk-taking.

The dispositional models of art teaching and learning, most notably the studio habits of mind (Hetland, Winner, Veneema, & Sheridan, 2013), lend useful language and structures to the

habits and practices of authentic artmaking that happen in this in-between space, and that center student practice not on what they are making, but on how they are going about it. The process of developing and iterating on ideas naturally requires students to, for example, *engage and persist* with ideas and works, *stretch and explore* as they brainstorm (in James's words, asking "where can I take this?"), *understand art worlds* as they place their work in relation to that of other artists, and *envision, observe, reflect,* and *express* in the execution and refinement of their own work as it develops. This language of process is mentioned here in an effort to highlight the somewhat paradoxical nature of creative investigation: it is an experience of uncertainty and not-knowing in the context of the singular work at hand, and alternately, it is a process of putting together and exercising *all* that one knows about the act of creating more broadly.

Given this widely-accepted reality that at the outset of the creative process, ideas may be ambiguous at best, it is especially striking that across all four school sites it was common practice for students to be asked to list their ideas, essentially articulating the potential core meaning and about-ness of their Sustained Investigations, before any of that work had yet been created. Rachel was the only teacher to describe processes of facilitating this brainstorming process, including the "trash critique" and the creation of a Pinterest board, that allowed for visually-based sources of ideas and interests that could drive the Sustained Investigation. The widespread nature of the more linear and language-based approach, centered on establishing intent and then executing it, may also reflect some facets of contemporary pedagogical and curriculum design processes, which often features conceptual intent as a foundation, focusing on big ideas (Wiggins & McTighe, 2006; Walker, 2001; Walker, 2006) as the basis of artistic inquiry. Ideas or about-ness are certainly central to the Sustained Investigation, but it does not necessarily follow that this about-ness must be the first aspect of the work to be defined. As

students take the reins of problem-definition in the space of the Sustained Investigation, it may be beneficial to explore a wider range of more accessible entry points to ideas.

Investigation and pursuit. Participants shared that this need for trust, flexibility, and comfort with the ambiguity of one's ideas was not only necessary at the beginning of the process of creating a Sustained Investigation, but throughout the entire endeavor, as they actively constructed and re-constructed their own intent for their work. Their descriptions of the Sustained Investigation process were rife with metaphors of active pursuit and movement—referring to it as a "journey," as something to "chase," or describing ideas with "mileage," or of encountering "peaks and valleys" in productivity. Even Stephanie's analogy about the tree branch versus the wagon wheel centers not only the idea of growth, but of organic movement as a central feature of the Sustained Investigation. Essential to this conception of movement, growth, and pursuit is the idea that the artist or pursuer cannot see the final outcome but is following the idea to see where it leads. Rachel said of the process, "you're not in control of it, really. You're in control of your interpretation of it, but you're not able to tell it where it's gonna go, it tells you." Some students described the ways that their processes and the meaning of their work evolved as the ideas themselves evolved. Olivia's work "got messier," for example, while Brianna's became more personal over time. In a reflection echoing Beardsley's (1965) comment that the artist is primarily concerned with the question of what happens next, James recalled consistently stepping back to ask himself, "where can I take this?"

As noted above, sometimes students fully changed their minds and abandoned initial ideas in favor of new ones, but this more nuanced process of ongoing and reflective production could also result in a more subtle shifting of ideas. Olivia, for example, realized after her work was complete that maybe it was about nostalgia rather than the idea of home. Meghan likened

ideas to friendships that may change throughout high school: “the ideas you start with aren’t necessarily the ideas you’re going to end with...and that’s okay.” As a teacher, Rachel saw it as her role to aid students in this reflection and clarification, often asking students, “is it actually about *this*?” She also spoke about work that is uniformly technically polished as “stagnant,” further highlighting that the movement and evolution of the body of work is central to its purpose. Readers were especially concerned with finding these qualities of investigation in student work, and Carl described a hallmark of investigation as “when what they pursued kind of ignited the creation,” or when students continue to ask questions that lead to further questions. Lisa expressed a similar idea, that a Sustained Investigation was “the continuation of an idea, a thought,” over an extended period of time.

Depth and originality. Just as there were a number of movement- and journey-related metaphors for the investigation process, there were equally rich and varied descriptions of the qualities of a worthwhile idea, especially from the perspectives of teachers and readers: it is *meaty*, it has *depth*, it *envelops* you, it is *fresh*, or *exciting*, or *original*. It is *evocative*. Ideas with these qualities were ones that lent themselves to the process of active investigation or pursuit described above. In many ways, these were seen as being intertwined: the quality of the pursuit determines the quality of the idea. Several respondents noted this connection, and while teachers and readers especially could cite tired or clichéd ideas—generic explorations around the topic of emotions, for example—their comments often revealed that these ideas were not inherently inferior as much as they were under-explored or under-developed. In Lisa’s words, “they don’t dig deep enough to get to any content.”

Some noted this distinction between the qualities of an idea and of its investigation: while Rachel had a “danger zone” Pinterest board full of ideas to avoid, her broader point was that

making work that was simply derivative of these examples would hold students back from deeper investigation, or from work that truly reflected them as artists. In her description of working with a student doing food photography, her concern was not so much that the idea itself was generic but that the student was pursuing it in an imitative way. The question she posed was, "what is individual about your interpretation of this food photography?" Her student, Michelle, made a very similar observation, remembering learning in her psychology course that "humans are mimickers," but reasoning that "the important thing about art is that you get away from that mimicking... the mimicking is supposed to help you learn, but then you branch off to your other stuff, to expand yourself."

Students, teachers, and readers all spoke about notions of originality and of staying away from over-done topics, but also acknowledged that there was still room for original and individual approaches to familiar artistic ideas. Lisa spoke pointedly about how ideas that might be thought of as trite or clichéd are still valid: "do not pigeonhole that...that doesn't mean that they're not going to do it really well." She and other participants were committed to the notion that personal relevance of ideas was what drove the depth and immersive nature of the investigation process. Students across school sites acknowledged this as well. When Olivia spoke about reviewing her initial ideas with Mitch, she described that he helped students to see "which ones were stronger," but then clarified that "stronger" ideas were "ones we could actually...explore for a full year." Laura mentioned sharing similar advice with her students, highlighting the importance of ideas that have "some room for investigation." Similarly to Mitch, her process of vetting ideas was more accurately one of vetting students' thoughts on how they would investigate the ideas: she was interested in hearing their descriptions of how they envisioned approaching this work more than hearing the idea itself, and she recognized that

students were in danger when they could not describe what the process might look like at all. Her student, Gabriela, shared similar observations, reasoning that "I think what makes a good idea is the meat of it. What can you make from that idea, or what is there to bounce off of that idea?" She reinforced the idea that personal investment is the driver of the investigation process, and that "even if it may not seem like the best idea, you're going to always work it out in a way...so that it has a purpose." Michelle shared this viewpoint that originality is somewhat overrated, saying that it "doesn't matter if you think it's already been an idea that's been pursued a lot... you just do it."

Many studies of artistic practice are conducted through a creativity-focused theoretical lens—that is, assuming originality as primary goal of artists and marker of success. From the perspective of creativity researchers, many successful artists are "prolific," repeating the same ideas with minor variation, rather than truly "creative," or developing new and novel forms and meanings (Stokes & Fisher, 2005). This bias towards originality, however, is sometimes at odds with the goals that students articulate for themselves in their work—and, presumably, the goals that many of the above-mentioned "prolific" artists may establish. Barrett's (2006) principles for postmodern education also include the challenge of "rejecting originality" (p. 3). In the case of the Sustained Investigation, teacher, student, and reader comments on originality were not so much concerned with novelty for its own sake, as they were with the development of artistic voice—of becoming deeply engaged in the process and developing work that was authentic to the maker. Originality was not a goal of authentic investigation, but rather its by-product.

Meaningful Ideas

In addition to establishing what Sustained Investigations might be about, or what makes an idea particularly viable, participants addressed what makes ideas meaningful. While meaning

in artmaking may sometimes be understood or discussed as the concept, big idea, or overall about-ness of the work—and, indeed, this is largely how Barrett (2011) and Walker (2001, 2004, 2006) use the term in their extensive discussions of meaning in artmaking—the term *meaning* is being used in the context of this discussion to refer to the aspects of the idea that are important to the creator—the reason that the idea is deemed worth pursuing. This portion of the discussion will shed light on students' own priorities for their Sustained Investigations, highlighting the qualities of their ideas that they identified as meaningful or personally worthwhile.

Meaning, in all cases, was found to relate to the self in a number of ways. Students described that meaning may come from the personal relevance, either of the topic itself or of its emotional associations on the part of the artist. Personal meaning could also be derived from establishing one's own artistic processes and sensibilities in pursuing the idea, and of experiencing a greater self-identity as artist because of that pursuit. Furthermore, respondents noted that meaning is embedded both in the work itself and in the processes of its creation, including ongoing experimentation and writing.

Meaningful Work is Personally Relevant

A hallmark of ideas as they were described by students was their inherently and unavoidably personal nature. Even when they did not describe their work as being explicitly autobiographical, it was inevitably informed by their own experiences, inclinations, or sensibilities, and was often driven by a deeply held emotional investment. In most cases, these bodies of work could be considered investigations of self-as-artist as much as they were investigations of other stated ideas. Ideas could be identified as personally meaningful in a number of ways. The themes themselves were sometimes personally significant, and relatedly, there was often a perceived necessity of emotional investment in the creation of this work. The

Sustained Investigation often strengthened students' self-identities as artists as well, as they developed and refined their individual artistic processes and sensibilities.

Working with ideas of personal significance. All students could point to the personal relevance of their stated core ideas, relating them to personal experiences, interests, and relationships. Meghan and Gabriela both documented relationships with family and friends (and in Gabriela's case, the experience of growing up with these friends) in their work. Several other students used their Sustained Investigations as a lens for considering aspects of their own lived experiences in a wide range of forms: Olivia considered the idea of home as it related to her personal connection of home, and the coming experience of leaving home. Michelle was interested in representing her own subconscious world, and the experience of her dreams. Haley revealed that her interest in representing objectification had specifically grown out of her experiences of being a new student in her school. James's exploration of the concept of skin at first seemed somewhat cerebral, but he later revealed that the choice of subject matter also stemmed from his preoccupation with skin and experiences with acne: "a big part of it," he admitted, "has always been an internal motivation." Brianna's work related deeply to personal experiences of sexual assault, and the strength associated with moving forward—her own strength, and that of the women around her. Finally, some students found personal resonance in their work by drawing on activities or topics of interest. Valery described that her exploration of architecture began to come together when she considered using her favorite travel photos as an anchor for this body of work. Jenna found that interviewing peers about nightmares was extremely personally interesting ("I could just keep talking to people about that kind of thing forever"), and formatting her work as a book also related to her interest in becoming an illustrator. Paige's interest in the relationship of art to the artist and the viewer related to her

personal interest in the field of psychology; similarly. Sofia's choice of windows was directly linked to her career goals in interior design.

Across all sites, students recalled receiving direct instruction from their teachers that their Sustained Investigations should draw on personal experience and ideas of personal relevance. In the public school, Michelle recalled that Rachel told students to "choose something that means a lot to you...choose an issue that matters to you, or something that happened in your life." She said that Rachel had explained that the Sustained Investigation was "basically just a big expression of yourself." The other three teachers expressed similar sentiments, reasoning that the work is always richer when it comes from students' own lives in a meaningful way.

Most readers spoke about the strength of personally relevant ideas as well. Lisa advised that students should make work about "what matters to them," to "take a personal stake in it." Furthermore, she argued that this personal stake should not be contrived, reasoning that if a student creates a body of work about depression, for example, but has no personal experience with it, this distance will be evident in the work.

The creation of meaningful work depends on students' own self-knowledge and trust in their own ideas and insights, and their feeling that this self-knowledge and insight may be expressed in the art room (Hafeli, 2012; James, 2000; Johnson, 2012). They must be able to locate sources of personal significance for their work and be confident in their belief that these sources are valid and viable vehicles for artmaking (Hafeli, 2002). All too often, the negotiation of meaning in adolescent artmaking becomes just that—a negotiation—between competing teacher and student priorities, or perceptions of priorities, for what a work should be about or how it should be carried out (Burton & Hafeli, 2012). It is notable that in the cases of these four school sites, there was little tension between student intentions and teacher priorities. All

teachers recalled instances where they doubted the long-term feasibility of certain student ideas, but they had learned to ask questions of the student (How will you do this? Why are you interested in this idea; what is it about it?) to explore its potential together rather than dismissing the idea out of hand.

Emotionally resonant work. When several students described the experience of abandoning earlier ideas, they explained that they did not care enough about that work to continue. In other words, they recognized the absence of an emotional investment that they felt was necessary to produce worthwhile work. At the arts magnet school, Paige described having a "breakdown" and wondering "if I'm only doing things that aren't important...do I really have value as an artist?" She recognized her initial idea of fairytales in a modern context as essentially "good," but said that she did not care enough to "see it through." In drawing this distinction, she noted the difference between ideas with conceptual merit and those that are personally worthwhile. Several students noted the necessity of this personal buy-in: Meghan reasoned that "especially with art, you have to be passionate about it," and Brianna similarly spoke at length about the necessity of passion, as did Rachel's students—Michelle recalled that Rachel had expressed the need to pursue "whatever sets your heart on fire." At the parochial school, Gabriela described that she wanted her work to be "heartfelt," referencing this same need for emotional vitality in her Sustained Investigation.

Students also spoke about their emotions as a sort of barometer for gauging their own satisfaction with their work. When Valery recalled changing her idea from gentrification to architecture, she said it was because "at first I was excited but then...I just don't feel that anymore. It felt like a hassle to take those kinds of pictures." Later on, she described that after submitting her portfolio she felt "relief, because I was able to finish and do something I actually

cared about." When she spoke about the need for an openness to change one's mind about the direction of the Sustained Investigation, she said it was because bad ideas "will feel like work, and that's not what you want it to feel like." Jenna also used the term "relief" to describe how she felt when she decided to pursue the nightmare book idea. Brianna described making her sculptures as a way of processing trauma-related emotions, and shared that she wanted her viewers to have emotional responses to her work, as she had. Haley commented half-jokingly that "I use art as my therapy," and her work reflected her frustrations and curiosities about notions of self-representation. Olivia structured aspects of her process around her own personal emotional responses to her work in progress, describing that "I would write down the different emotions" that she associated with each work, so that she could focus on different emotions in the next piece.

In the views of many participants, this emotional investment resulted in work that was original, powerful, and true to the artist. Briana reasoned that "whatever you feel, you're going to reflect in your artwork, and you should always reflect the deepest and most powerful part of your emotions." Mitch, her teacher, echoed this sentiment, acknowledging the strength and emotional toll of choosing to do work that is intensely personal, but that "it's phenomenal to see her rewarded for all that risk-taking and courage."

Developing and recognizing individual processes and sensibilities. Students naturally aimed to ensure that their ideas were clearly evident in their work, but most also had a closely-held desire to see *themselves* represented in their work: to make things that matched their own interests and sensibilities as individuals and as artists. This was evident not only in their finished work, but in the ways that they structured their processes. James spoke directly about his interest in his own artistic agency—a desire to do things "structured in my own way." He realized that

the ability to go out into the world and explore was a driver for his interests as a photographer, and he structured his Sustained Investigation around building these kinds of opportunities for himself. He defined this process as his process, explaining that "that's just what I do now." His fellow photographer Meghan shared a remarkably similar explanation of her process of setting up one-on-one photo shoots: "that's kind of how I practice." Their classmate Vanessa spoke about realizing that having material constraints was something that drove her as an artist; these limitations forced her to be inventive, and she recognized that she felt energized rather than frustrated in these moments. Michelle developed highly individual processes, involving categorizing, analyzing, and writing about her dreams in addition to representing them visually; she considered all of these stages to be core components of her work. In working on her 'zine, Gabriela developed a rhythm in her process that she found productive: she would plan a somewhat structured "day of shooting," to gather as much raw material as possible, and then alternate this structured productivity with a more intuitive process of developing layouts for each page of the 'zine, experimenting with layering and mixing media. Brianna also described a personal and somewhat intuitive process of connecting her experiments with new materials to experiences and felt emotions.

In the development of these personal processes, there is an interest in locating and amplifying one's artistic voice. Meghan had a directly stated intent of capturing "photos only I could take," but this interest was shared by most of the students: they wanted to do work that felt unique to them, and that others could not have produced in the same way. Michelle noted that she was the only person who could have done this work about her dreams because, naturally, she was the only person who had experienced them. She spoke also about developing her own aesthetic for her work: "it's got the whimsy [of fantasy] but it's still very moody." Sofia noticed

“how much better I got,” both in her skills as a photographer and in the development of her point of view as an artist. She described wanting to create photos with “character,” explaining that these would “show the area that you’re from, and it shows who you are as a person.” Gabriela was also interested in that specificity in authentically representing the experiences of herself and her peers. Burton (2011) described adolescents’ processes of “trying on” approaches and styles as artists, determining the ones that “create the most advantageous presentation of self” (2011, p. 47). Manifold (2009, 2012) noted this element of searching for a personal style as a primary motivator for adolescents who create fan art. This work is often maligned in art classrooms because the subject matter is seen as derivative, but the more central purpose—the development of self as an artist within a particular community of like-minded artists—is overlooked in this reading. Originality is often not a goal that holds much meaning for adolescents, but seeing *themselves* in their work is often a high priority. Definition of process, therefore, is inextricably tied up in definition of self, and adolescent artists naturally experiment with approaches in an effort to arrive at the truest sense of self-representation.

Olivia was the only student to comment on the drawbacks to this realization of artistic voice: she sometimes felt limited by these signature sensibilities. She had an interest in creating colorful work but her Sustained Investigation ended up being overwhelmingly white, and exceedingly neat. She referenced her strengths related to “craftsmanship and focusing on being really nitpicky about how things look,” and described a similar propensity towards making work that involved repetitive motions. Although she knew these were her tendencies as an artist, she admitted that “I guess a part of me really, really wanted to think otherwise.”

Teachers and readers acknowledged the central importance of this development of voice in the Sustained Investigation process. Rachel structured her practice as an AP teacher around

understanding students' own artistic goals and interests as completely and clearly as possible, and leaving her own sensibilities out of the conversation. Stephanie shared a core interest in recognizing and honoring student voice, both as a teacher and as a reader, expressing that "I hope [students] realize that they have stories to tell, and that their stories are valued, and were valued in this context."

Self as artist. In addition to developing their own artistic sensibilities, several students and teachers spoke about the meaning and significance of the Sustained Investigation as an opportunity for students to step into the role of artist more fully. Jenna shared that the experience of completing her AP portfolio "made me feel like I truly belonged as an artist." She explained that before, "I [took] a couple of art classes and I really like all this stuff," but questioned, "am I serious about it?" Valery described a similar self-satisfaction when her work was complete, describing that "it just felt like I was in control of my life, weirdly enough... like I was growing up. I just liked being in charge of what I wanted to do." James reflected that his work represented "who I am as a photographer but also who I am overall," linking the quality of individual voice with his specific identity as an emerging photographer.

In general, teachers also regarded their students as artists: beyond their interest and support in developing their emerging creative voices, there was a general stance towards viewing students *as* artists, as opposed to people who were taking an art class. Mitch also commented on the AP experience as useful preparation for student artists who might consider further pursuing art in the future.

The above aspects of meaning-making and artistic practice, which are fully bound up in ideas of personal identity, find resonance in studies of artists and art students alike. In a study of "optimal experience" in artmaking (Banfield & Burgess, 2013), artists cited their own sense of

identity as an artist as a factor in the quality of the experience of creation and the meaning of their work. Similarly, in their study of professional artists' practices, Mace and Ward (2002) noted that artists cite the creation of meaning as a core purpose of making art. Salazar (2014) documented the same values and priorities among undergraduate art students: among the "pedagogical ideals" that students considered the most valuable in an art school education were being seen and known by their professors, learning skills in a way that would empower them to express something, and developing their own creative ideas of significance.

Meaning is Embedded in Process and Idea

Participants' comments reflected an understanding that meaning is embedded in technical choices, rather than somehow existing separately from them. They described the creation of personal meaning as a driver on students' selection of media and techniques and considered the ways that practices of ongoing experimentation and writing could serve the meaning of the work by giving students space to work out their intentions and choices in thoughtful and purposeful ways.

Linking media to idea. Teachers, students, and readers all spoke about the relationship of idea to media and process, explaining the ways that meaning could be better expressed if these two components related to and reinforced one another. This was somewhat less pronounced among students who chose photography as a medium, although they did describe the ways that specific compositional choices related to their ideas and intentions. Some of the sculpture-based examples exhibited this the most overtly, as materials became metaphors for ideas. Brianna, for example, described a sculpture juxtaposing a soft, heavy, sand-filled nylon tube precariously hanging between structures made of paper: the tension between the materials, and the anticipation of ripping, was what created a visceral response in the viewer. Similarly, Vanessa's

use of unexpected materials, such as adhering needles and pills to the side of a handbag, created an element of surprise that amplified her ideas more than a more symbolic representation might have. In a two-dimensional example, Gabriela used layering, accumulation, and sewing in her ‘zine to represent ideas of transformation and growth.

Almost all teachers and readers spoke about the necessity of not only showcasing one’s technical skills but demonstrating these skills in clear service of a concept. Mitch spoke at length about this interrelationship and his student, Paige, echoed his comments as she discussed craftsmanship and clarity of communication as her dual primary goals for her work.

In the public school, Haley spoke about this as working with “purpose,” and described making deliberate choices in the consistency of the paint she used in order to align with her ideas. She had strong opinions about the necessity of beginning with this purpose or conceptual intent, and then making material choices accordingly. Her classmate Jenna had similar thoughts, and spoke about the usefulness of asking herself “why?” about the choices that she made with her work. She was similarly deliberate about her material choices, selecting media that would best represent each nightmare for her book. Their teacher, Rachel, believed that media and idea should align, but left more space for considering the ways that one might begin with material choices, and let these inform the work’s conceptual content. James, the photographer from the private school, would have agreed with her. He explained that “I don’t always try and make it have a huge overall message and moral...it can just be visually appealing.” To be clear, his work was not about nothing, but his motivation as a creator was found in material and process-related concerns rather than conceptual ones. James (2000) and Walker (2001, 2014) note the use of visual metaphor as a hallmark of a certain degree of sophistication and conceptual rigor in student artwork. The perspectives of the students here—some of whom would agree heartily and

others who are more ambivalent—raise questions about biases and assumptions in considerations of artistic quality. Work without an overtly conceptual component is often made that way deliberately, as an expression of the student artist's priorities, not necessarily out of a lack of understanding of the ways that visual metaphors work.

Although the teachers and students seemed to accept it as a given that medium and idea must relate and serve one another, the readers addressed this need as an entry point to describing the relative rarity of this quality in the student portfolios that they reviewed at the annual readings. All four expressed that they value technical skill, and that it plays a central role in the reading process, but that they frequently encountered technically masterful portfolios that were built around no evident ideas. Both Fred and Lisa noted a personal bias toward valuing conceptual strength as much as, or more than, technical skill.

Teachers and readers commented that this practice of merging technique and idea so they serve and reinforce one another might be a departure in pedagogical practice for many art educators, who may prioritize the teaching of technique over concept. Rachel mentioned that she did not work with ideas in any depth until she was in graduate school, and Fred encapsulated the approach of separating content and technique as "first learn to draw, and then you can express yourself." Carl thought of this as a "20th century model" and commented that it is almost artificial to enforce any separation between? these two components of form and meaning, as they naturally merge in the creation of anything. Efland (1990) commented on the tension between teaching art content—meaning techniques and styles, or focusing on elements and principles—and self-expression, which could be characterized by the absence of rules and structures, and similar divisions have been noted between formal and conceptual concerns in contemporary art education literature, as distinctions are noted between the often-formulaic assignment-driven

“school art” that emerges in many K-12 classrooms. Gude (2004), however, might side with Carl in arguing that there is never truly any division between form and meaning in the creation of art, but art educators have created these artificial divides that run counter to the intent of the artists on whose work the assignments are often based. “When Paul Klee asked students to do a line exercise,” she commented, “it was not because he felt they should learn markmaking before doing more meaningful art. Rather, it was because Klee was excited about the meaning of line” (2004, p. 8). Likewise, when AP students selected and honed their skills with new media and processes, they never spoke of technique as an end in itself, but rather as a means of enabling more meaningful expression.

The role of experimentation. As noted above, students experimented with media and processes to find approaches that best suited their own sensibilities as artists. This experimentation had a second purpose as well, as they developed methods that would best serve their ideas. Stephanie described this element of process as “research,” and described it as an essential component of the Sustained Investigation. Sandra reinforced this emphasis on experimentation with her students, reasoning that if they wanted to be able to demonstrate a range of approaches toward considering their ideas, they needed to get comfortable with trying new approaches.

To return to the students’ views of their work and processes, Brianna explained that “it’s about playing with the mediums that really pushes me,” enabling her to make connections to the ideas she hoped to express. In contrast, her peer Olivia also spoke about experimentation, but in a less intuitive manner. Especially in her wearable house sculpture, she described a process of testing out different materials until the emerging sculpture matched the image in her mind. Vanessa explained that “my best work is play,” and found that experimenting with unexpected

materials made her ideas stronger. She also spoke about the value of experimentation in enabling her to be flexible as an artist, explaining that "when something doesn't work out, because nothing ever works out, you can improvise."

Writing and meaning. The notion of writing as a component of the creative process, and specifically as a tool for clarifying one's thoughts on meaning, was especially divisive among students. Michelle, Haley, and others talked about writing as a tool for clarifying ideas, and Michelle referred to this as "solving the puzzle" of understanding her own dreams and translating them to her artwork. Olivia and Paige made lists of words and ideas as tools for planning and transitioning from one piece to the next. For Gabriela, writing was very directly a part of the development of her work, as it was embedded in the work: her 'zine included two written components. Other students spoke very little about writing as it related to process, and almost all students prepared the written statements that accompanied their portfolios as a final step towards submitting their work. James reasoned that for him, this order of things was necessary, as he needed to create work first before he could put words to his ideas or intentions. At his school, Sandra spoke about having students write and keep visual journals, and other teachers also advocated to their students for writing as a tool. Very few students spoke about the usefulness of such assignments or expectations, however; in the instances where they found writing to be useful, it was largely self-directed.

Readers commented that most often, students' written statements seemed to have been completed as an afterthought, and their words often lent few insights toward illuminating any meaning associated with the work. Carl described this as "checking off a box," and reasoned that "I think sometimes they might revert back to what they feel is expected from them, as opposed to what truly is something that they would like to say about the work."

Successful Meaningful Ideas

Finally, participants commented on their conceptions of success in the context of the Sustained Investigation, and the ways that this success relates or does not relate to the qualities that make a work meaningful. They noted that success has connotations of a challenge that has been accepted and met, and that this challenge could relate to achieving high standards in the technical execution of one's work, but could also have to do with stretching one's abilities in other dimensions, including risk-taking or experimentation with new processes. The notion of success also suggests an audience for the work: someone who will pass judgment on the relative merits of what has been produced. Participants considered the meaning of success as it related to four types of audiences: students themselves, a general audience of "others," teachers as audience, and readers as audience. Students in particular commented not only on their assumptions about the expectations of each of these audiences, but the degree to which these expectations mattered to their own processes of creating meaning as artists.

Successful Ideas are Challenging

Participants described personal challenge as a marker of success in undertaking the Sustained Investigation, and conceptualized this notion of challenge in two primary ways. First, holding a high standard for technical excellence reflected a commitment to creating challenging work. Second, including and beyond this technical ambition, they described the idea of pushing oneself to do "something big," in Mitch's words, and produce work at the edges of one's abilities, perhaps in volume, in scale, or in conceptual rigor.

Technical excellence and high personal standards. Many students, across all school sites, expressed a drive toward technical excellence in their work, even as they acknowledged other expressive goals. The refinement of skill related directly to these other goals, for many: if

you are meant to be passionate about your ideas, then technical polish is evidence of that care and passion. Some students, like Vanessa, valued work that was especially labor-intensive, and she reflected that "it felt great when it paid off," referring to having put so much time and effort in order to achieve particular aesthetic goals. Olivia spoke in similar terms about her home-related sculptures, and she strove for a neatness and precision in their execution. Paige talked about the importance of craftsmanship in her personal satisfaction with her work as well. Jenna discussed her goals of expanding her capabilities with new media in the creation of her book but maintaining a goal of having a professional-looking product. She said she knew she was finished when she had "no complaints anymore." Her peer Michelle similarly had high expectations for her work's appearance and explained that "if something doesn't feel detailed enough for me, that's when I don't like it typically." Valery, Sofia, and Gabriela spoke about formal and technical results primarily in terms of a masterful use of the elements of art and principles of design, as this was Laura's favored language for evaluating student work. Valery spoke about the purposeful use of visual contrast in her work and of being proud when she knew she had used this principle well. As has been noted, contemporary pedagogical literature (Barrett, 2006; Duncum, 2010; Gude, 2004, 2007; Walker, 2001, 2004) often discussed the short-sightedness of technical excellence as an end in itself—an endeavor devoid of true meaning. The students' investment and pride in the technical merits of their work remind us that such qualities are only meaningless when defined on someone else's terms.

Sandra, Mitch, and Laura all advocated for the value of working with familiar techniques and processes as a way of better ensuring the quality of the end result. For the most part, students agreed, but students at the magnet school in particular reported feeling somewhat encouraged to play it safe and not challenge themselves in their use of media and techniques.

Pushing yourself. This occasional resistance to playing it safe relates to another commonly acknowledged marker of success among teachers, students, and readers: the Sustained Investigation was viewed as an opportunity to push oneself as an artist and take risks. When explaining how he described the Sustained Investigation to his new students at the start of the year, Mitch said he wanted students to understand that "this is something big, this is a challenge." Similarly, when reflecting on what he hoped students' long-term takeaways would be from their AP participation, he said he wanted them to walk away with the knowledge that they "did something special," appreciating that significant "physical work and emotional tax" were involved in seeing it through.

Readers recognized the value in taking risks and making unexpected choices in one's work, and most of the standout portfolios that they recalled as exceptional shared these qualities of surprise and ambition: the "God portfolio" of wall-sized paintings made with materials found in nature, for example, or the photographs of neighbors drinking tea which then were printed on the surface of teabags, which then became suspended as part of a sculpture made with tea trays. This building of ideas into ever-more ambitious formats of presentation was striking to viewers and suggested a deep engagement on the part of the artist.

This desire to do something big and push one's limits showed up in the comments of students across all four school sites, although their particular conceptions of challenge naturally varied. Vanessa's personal challenge was related to the labor-intensive processes noted above, while James pushed himself to make his photographic investigations as broad as possible, producing a large volume of varied work. "I just wanted to overdo it," he said, "so I could make it really good." At the parochial school, Sofia talked about learning to be persistent, as she worked through feeling blocked: "my determination throughout the process increased."

For other students, the personal challenge was about taking on a kind of work that they had never before attempted. In describing her decision to represent her own dreams, Michelle said, “I was trying to define something that I haven’t necessarily gone for, like I haven’t really tried to define before.” Of her work, Olivia said, “I just wanted to make something that I hadn’t seen before,” and described that she had never made anything like the work she produced this year. She explained that “I just wanted to see myself doing things that I felt uncomfortable with, and that maybe I wouldn’t do again.” She said that she recognized at the outset that she was setting a high bar, but felt that such work “really forced me to think the whole year.” References to pain, endurance, and discomfort ran throughout Olivia’s comments—the work was “emotionally draining,” she recalled “agonizing” over new ideas—but ultimately she described the body of work as “difficult, and also really rewarding.” All three arts magnet students described a clear relief at the completion of the Sustained Investigation, and a desire specifically to return to artmaking that did not require as much personal challenge and risk. From the reader perspective, Lisa acknowledged a common assumption that conceptually rigorous work must be angst-filled and “there can’t be joy if it’s going to be conceptual.” This observation, paired with student comments about feeling drained or uncomfortable, may raise concerns about students’ views of what it is to be an artist: are they simply responding to the old cliches about suffering for one’s work? On the other hand, is it natural to expect that creating something new should be enjoyable all the time? In the Banfield and Burgess (2013) study of optimal experience in artmaking also cited above, artists noted that immersion, a sense of challenge, and enjoyment combined to contribute to positive experiences of artmaking, so perhaps the challenge and the reward cannot be separated from one another. Hafeli (2002) had similar findings with student

artists, who reported that undertaking something difficult in their artmaking made that work inherently meaningful.

Audience and Meaning

A discussion of success invites the question of on whose terms success is being determined, and the Sustained Investigation has a number of audiences who may ascribe different meaning or value to different aspects of the work. Participants commented on the role of four audience types—a general audience of "others," teachers, readers, and the students themselves—in defining qualities of success in student artmaking.

General "others" as audience (including peers). Several students across school sites spoke of the sense of accomplishment at having made something that communicated their ideas accessibly and clearly to an audience outside of themselves—but not necessarily an audience specifically of readers. Paige spoke about clarity of communication as a personal marker of success, and of wanting her work to be not only appreciated, but understood, by outside viewers. She was frustrated at times when the meaning of her paintings was difficult for viewers to detect. Similarly, Vanessa felt reassured when audiences, especially peers, understood the political and social commentary present in her work. Haley articulated a clear goal for communication in her paintings on online objectification: "what I wanted people to take away was, what's on there isn't real." She said she wanted viewers to feel "unsettled." Brianna similarly wanted to evoke feelings in her audience. Other students commented on a more general goal of *appreciation* by an outside audience; James tied his work to a kind of social acceptance: "we just wanted to impress everyone at school."

Teacher as audience. Students did not often speak about making their work specifically to meet perceived teacher expectations, but several commented on their teachers' roles as

valuable collaborators and sounding boards for their work as it developed. All four teachers acknowledged and embraced this role of coach and collaborator, noting basic encouragement as central component of their roles in guiding students through their Sustained Investigations. According to Mitch, “they need a little bit of a pat on the back that says, ‘you know, what you’re doing is wonderful. Keep on doing this. You’re doing a fantastic job. Don’t panic.”

To a limited degree, teachers built their own structures or expectations within the construct of the Sustained Investigation—Laura had most students work with photography as a medium, for example, although this was less about her own preference for photography than it was about her interest in keeping the process manageable for students. More often, however, teachers served less as a primary audience, and more as a reflection of other audiences, directing students toward consideration toward reader expectations and toward students themselves as a primary audience. A few commented on the importance of students understanding that the teacher was not the primary audience: when Mitch critiqued student work using the portfolio guidelines, he pointed out that “it isn’t me,” when their work did not yet measure up to all criteria. Rachel similarly de-centered herself as an arbiter of success in student work, but rather than turning toward reader expectations, she redirected students toward themselves, explaining that “I care that you submit, and I care that you’re proud of your work.” In many ways, teachers did not constitute an audience type that was fully separate from the others, but would function alternately as a stand-in for the reader and for the student artists themselves, helping students to clarify their own goals and intentions, and ensure that their work matched their own expectations. Such a stance is naturally reflective in nature, requiring teachers to step in or step back (Hafeli, 2012) while intuiting students’ own needs for autonomy or assistance in their work.

Reader as audience. Students did not speak about identifying ideas or creating work specifically with reader expectations in mind, except in the case of ensuring that they did not select "overdone" topics for their Sustained Investigation work. A few were directly opposed to the possibility of reader influence on their own vision as artists. Meghan, for example, commented, "I'm very much against doing something, especially with art, for someone else—like doing something in my education for the person who's going to be grading it." Her classmate James agreed, reasoning that even though the work will be evaluated by others, "it's still for you." Students at other sites echoed this belief that the eventual scoring process did not influence their choices relating to the content at the heart of their work.

In an interesting juxtaposition, this perspective did not always apply to their views on the written statement that accompanied the Sustained Investigation. Most students viewed this component as one that existed primarily for this outside audience. It was often prepared entirely in anticipation of what they felt the reader wanted to see, deliberately omitting personal material as irrelevant. Gabriela had written an artist's statement about her 'zine project and recalled editing this statement before sending it in, making it "less about emotional value." Valery recalled writing mostly about the formal components of her work, and omitting "the emotional process I went through," because "I don't think they really care about how I felt." Although Meghan felt strongly about not creating work specifically to meet reader expectations, when she described her written statement, she spoke about her work in entirely different terms than she had in the rest of our conversation. The written description described her work as being about relationships, but also framed it as reflecting the seven Greek words for love. This is not necessarily untrue of her work, but it represents a possible shift in focus from the other, more personal meaning of her work. Readers commented on this somewhat detached quality of many

students' written statements. Carl described it as "check[ing] off a box," and reasoned that "they might revert back to what they feel is expected...as opposed to what truly is something that they would like to say about the work." Lisa echoed this concern, saying that student writing was often overly focused on "definitions," and that "they leave out the good stuff," about their processes or personal connections to their ideas. It might be argued here that the written statements related to students' conceptions of success—that is, the writing was a necessary component of pursuit of externally-defined success—but it did not play much of a role in their self-concept of success or of meaning.

While having the readers as an audience did not necessarily influence the *content* of students' work, several commented on the evaluation process as a motivator to challenge themselves on the *quality* of their work, and to take creative risks on the scale or process by which the work was created. Valery shared a similar perspective, and wanted to create work that was "AP ready." She explained that "if it was just for school, I don't think I would have tried that hard." Her teacher, Laura, acknowledged that participation in AP was meaningful, and that "they are trying to make their best work for AP. I think they do think about it differently." At the magnet school especially, teacher and student commentary reflected an awareness of representing one's school in the reading process, and wanting to represent it well. There were more clearly stated expectations that students would earn high scores. Olivia described that although her portfolio was quite personally meaningful, and executing it represented a large investment of time and energy, if it weren't being evaluated she might not have made it at all: "AP gave me a reason to work at the intensity that I was and with the commitment that I was," even though she maintained that she ultimately did not care about her final score.

Student/self as audience. In commenting that she might not have pursued this body of work if not for the audience of AP readers, Olivia maintained that she still viewed herself as the primary audience for the work: "I think that having this external reason to create pushed me towards internal goals, in a way." Teachers and students across sites reiterated the necessity of these "internal goals," and of the value of students' own pride, satisfaction, and personal investment in their work. Sofia recalled being aware of an outside audience, but asserted that ultimately, "I just wanted it to be good enough for me," and her peer Valery recalled that Laura "just wanted us to do what felt right." Michelle saw herself as the arbiter of her own success in visually representing her dreams, because her goal had been to represent the dreams "accurately, to myself."

Among the four teachers, Rachel was especially adamant that students should make the kind of work that they felt most compelled to make, especially as she simultaneously downplayed the role and influence of the portfolio scoring process to her students. All three of her students spoke of a desire to make ever-more personal work in the context of AP. Two students, Michelle and Haley, specifically aimed to merge their out-of-school artmaking—sketchbook drawings of monsters and other creatures—with their in-school AP work, despite some anxieties about being perceived as "weird" by their peers. Burton (2005, 2011) noted the commonality of such sentiments when she described the often-pronounced differences between adolescents' in-school and out-of-school art, highlighting that private sketchbooks often house more inventive and individual works of art than those made as assignments for outside consumption. She noted the value of such outlets as "a venue for serious play" in the creation of one's own visual language and imagery.

Students from other sites also spoke about the distinctions between in-school and out-of-school work, but on different terms. While Olivia and the other two magnet school students, Brianna and Paige, all made work that was deeply personally rooted—it was very much for them and about them—they all shared that this work was markedly different from work that they made outside of school, primarily for themselves or for friends, which Paige thought of as enjoyable but requiring less thought. Brianna described feeling free to make "pretty" work again over the summer, and Paige explained that she wanted to "just watercolor birds and people and random stuff." She specifically wanted to remind herself that "art can just be for fun, it doesn't have to have an idea." Literature on in-school versus out-of-school artmaking tend to generalize the in-school work as being overly focused on form and technique, and lacking in the personal meaning and value that students might find in, for example, fan-based artmaking in response to popular culture interests (Burton, 2011; Manifold, 2009). In this case, the AP students made meaningful work in school, but it was a meaning that was bound up in conceptual rigor and an ambitious level of production that they ultimately found exhausting. They were eager to shift gears and to create work grounded in a different form of meaning, based on a more personal sense of enjoyment and satisfaction, rather than in establishing oneself as an artist before an audience. Students were able to engage with conceptual ideation and meaning-making in rigorous ways, but ultimately this conceptual component was not a great source of personal meaning.

Chapter Summary

This chapter presented cross-case findings in relation to a range of art and art education literature, including studies of the habits and practices of professional artists, studies of teaching and learning in contemporary art classrooms, and writings on adolescents' motivations, content sources, and meaning-making strategies for their artmaking. The discussion described

participants' definitions of ideas in art, and then considered the ways that the AP students profiled here assigned personal meaning or value to those ideas. Finally, notions of success as they relate to meaning and value were considered.

Parallels were highlighted between AP students and professional artists practices in their sources for ideas or meaning in their work, and their processes of investigating those ideas and meanings. Students defined their ideas in a range of terms, from visible subject matter to relationships or feelings, to more abstract concepts. Pursuing their work often involved negotiating multiple related ideas simultaneously. They recognized that ideas evolve over time, and some students described embracing this exploratory and evolutionary nature of artmaking by making work that branched off from their own existing work, or sometimes by starting without a fully formed idea at all. Their descriptions of this ongoing, iterative, and reflective nature of artmaking relates to literature on creative practice as a process-event: an ongoing negotiation of choice and meaning, as if in conversation with the emergent work. Their experiences, and their similarity with practices described by professional artists, highlights the centrality and value of uncertainty and reflection in the creative process. These experiences reinforce the importance of idea or about-ness in artmaking, but call into question the utility of beginning the creative process by clearly articulating an intended central idea or meaning. Participant comments highlighted the relationship between notions of depth or originality in art to the process of investigation. The question was raised as to whether ideas deemed trite or cliched might truly be ideas that have not been adequately visually investigated.

The relationship of idea to meaning, or the perceived personal value or worthiness of the idea, was discussed as well. Comments of teachers, students, and readers revealed that hallmarks of meaning included work that embraced ideas of personal significance and work that was

emotionally resonant. Meaningful work also contributed to students' self-concepts as artists: it enabled them to develop and refine their own artistic processes and sensibilities, and it made them feel more comfortable in the role of artist. It was acknowledged and discussed that meaning does not reside only in the central idea for one's work, however that is articulated by the student, but that meaning is embedded in the processes of its creation as well. Process-oriented activities like experimentation and writing contributed to the development of a work's meaning over time.

The findings indicated that ideas may be meaningful with or without necessarily being successful, as success can often be defined on separate terms than meaning. Common markers of success in the context of the Sustained Investigation were the cultivation of technical excellence in one's work and holding oneself to high standards in its creation. In many cases, these high standards related to personal challenge and risk-taking, pushing oneself to do new things and to do them well. Participants commented on the influence of different audiences on the ways that they conceptualized success in the Sustained Investigation: peers or "others" as audience, teacher as audience, readers as audience, and self as audience. It was revealed that while students, teachers, and readers alike may all view the student as a primary audience for this body of work, as they all agreed it is meant to be personally meaningful, the presence of outside viewers does affect the ways that students approach this work, including both in idea definition and in the degree of personal challenge they were willing to undertake.

Chapter X

CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Dissertation Summary

The Sustained Investigation is a student-directed body of work completed as a portfolio requirement of the AP Studio Art (now AP Art and Design) course. It presents students with a particular challenge, as it grants them creative agency to a degree not often reflected in assignment-driven work: students identify the core idea of their investigation—what their work is about—and in doing so, identify what qualities of creative ideas are personally meaningful or worthwhile to them. It presents a pedagogical challenge as well, as the teacher, who has his or her own ideas and assumptions about ideas and meaning, steps into a role of coach or facilitator rather than direct instructor. The process is further complicated by the awareness that the Sustained Investigation will be scored by a panel of outside evaluators, or "readers." While defining and pursuing their own ideas, students must grapple with the presence of three intersecting audiences for this work: themselves, their teacher, and readers, and consider not only the personal meaning and relevance of their work, but the extent to which that significance can be communicated to these outside viewers. With these potentially competing priorities and perspectives in mind, the purpose of this dissertation was to document teacher, student, and reader descriptions of worthwhile ideas and processes of creative investigation as they relate to the Sustained Investigation.

Pilot Research

The development of this study was informed by several iterations of pilot research. In 2014, I interviewed three APSA students about their experiences developing the Concentration section of the portfolios (as this is the former term for the Sustained Investigation). They spoke of the challenge in choosing an idea that could be the basis of a full body of work and also spoke at length about the centrality of the teacher's role in helping them to generate and select ideas, as well as completing their work on time. These statements on the criticality of the teacher's presence suggested the possibility of competing priorities between teacher and student, so in 2015 I completed a larger pilot across multiple school sites, interviewing teachers and students about navigating the concentration, and interviewed AP readers for their perspectives on what constitutes a successful concentration. Overall, respondents described the Concentration in terms of evolution—of self/student as artist, and of the body of work as one that undergoes an evolutionary process. They also described the necessity of the work being personally relevant and acknowledged it as a challenging volume of work. Notably, only the adults (teachers and readers) used the term "investigation" in describing the Concentration process; students never used this inquiry-oriented language, although many did acknowledge a growth and deepening of their ideas and practice as their work developed. Interviewee responses began to shed light on the nuanced differences between the ways that an idea, in general, could be conceptualized, as opposed to a worthwhile or personally meaningful idea, and this distinction became the basis of much of my dissertation inquiry. In another round of pilot research, I collected 250 students' written Concentration statements to examine the ways that they identified and described the ideas at the heart of their work. The writing was somewhat vague, often relying on overly-general descriptions of themes and ideas—either listing subject matter, alluding to feelings or

emotions in a broad sense as the source of their work, or relying heavily on terminology of the elements of art and principles of design in offering a straightforward description of their work. This commentary was at odds with the richness of descriptions and motivations that I had collected in personal interviews with students, and I decided that in the dissertation study I would include interview-based discussion of student writing, to find out more about how they regarded that task, but would not analyze the writing on its own.

Research Design

This dissertation study was undertaken as a collective case study representing a single broad case—the APSA program—and sub-cases of four school sites as well as a selection of readers. The three participant types, including students, teachers, and readers, could also be considered sub-cases of their own. As a case study, the goal was to develop a holistic account of the questions being investigated (Creswell, 2013) and offering rich and multifaceted descriptions (Merriam, 1998) from the perspectives of all participants.

The selection of a range of school sites, including a suburban private school, an urban parochial school, a suburban arts magnet school, and a suburban public school, prioritized diversity in school types and locations. There were 20 total participants, including 12 students (three per site), four teachers, and four readers. Participating readers represented both high school and college faculty, and all had served in a reader role for several years.

This study was interview-based, and all participants participated in one-time, 90-minute interviews, all of which were held virtually. Interviews as a method allowed for data collection on participants' experiences with the Sustained Investigation, but also on the meaning that they made of those experiences (Seidman, 2013); this format could more adequately capture the level

of depth and nuance needed to examine participant thoughts on problem-finding and meaning-making. All interviews were semi-structured in nature and were conducted at the close of the school year, after students' Sustained Investigations had been completed and scored. The timing of these interviews was deliberate and reflected a retrospective post-then-pre design, as the research questions would be best answered by focusing on the perspective and meaning that participants made of the process at its close, when they could consider it as a whole and build their own narrative arcs of their experiences.

Interviews were transcribed and analyzed through an inductive coding process, beginning with descriptive coding and in vivo coding based on repeated reading of the transcripts. These codes were reviewed and consolidated through pattern coding. In addition, I maintained analytic memos throughout the process of data collection and analysis, and the themes and questions that emerged in these ongoing reflections became the basis for further analysis and coding. Findings were presented first in terms of school-as-case (considering readers as a separate and self-contained case), and then were analyzed and discussed in terms of cross-case trends and disparities.

Findings

The findings presented an examination of the ways that teachers, students, and readers defined and described the qualities of worthwhile ideas, discussed aspects of investigation, process, and practice, defined success, and considered the influence of audiences on the content, meaning, and value of the Sustained Investigation. These findings were presented according to aspects of practice or hallmarks/considerations related to the Sustained Investigation rather than by participant group, although disparities among participant types were noted when relevant.

Ideas. The comments of all three participant types, across all sites, reflected an understanding of *idea* as a broad umbrella term relating to a range of terms or concepts for organizing a body of work. In individual Sustained Investigation examples, core ideas were identified as themes, as concepts, as juxtapositions, as political or social messages, and as arising from feelings or emotions, among other approaches. Furthermore, as Sustained Investigation ideas were described in detail, it became apparent that this body of work routinely reflects a number of simultaneous ideas: even as the student artist might identify one primary idea, there were often numerous sub-goals or intentions, both technical and conceptual, informing the development of their work.

In addition to acknowledging a multiplicity of linked ideas, participants often described a nonlinearity of practice as a hallmark of the Sustained Investigation. Students often indicated that their ideas were not fully formed at the outset of the process and were only clarified through the process of making. Readers and some teachers acknowledged this reality of the creative process, and literature on professional artists' practices reveals the gradual definition and clarifying of ideas to be a common trait of their practices as well. In the process of identifying ideas worth pursuing, students might return to previous work to find an element that could inform something new or begin creating without fully defined ideas in mind.

In the Sustained Investigation, of course, students are not tasked with conceiving of a singular work of art, but rather in developing ideas that are pursued throughout the creation of a body of work. Just as many participants recognized the possibility of beginning without an idea, many also noted that ideas, even seemingly well-defined ones, evolve as the work evolves. In many ways, a hallmark of the Sustained Investigation was the experience of not fully knowing how the work might unfold. Using a variety of terms, participants described the Sustained

Investigation as a process that ideally involves the active pursuit of ideas, and some described a process of almost being in conversation with the work itself as it evolves. In the words of one teacher, Rachel, "you're not able to tell it where it's gonna go, it tells you." Given the possibility that ideas might change substantially as the work progresses, participants were notably divided on whether the final Sustained Investigation need necessarily be visually cohesive. There was notable disparity in opinions as to whether an artist's inevitable fingerprint on his or her work, as well as a continuing preoccupation with certain types of ideas, would ensure enough visual continuity, or whether it was necessary for student artists to purposefully limit their media and processes in order to ensure a cohesiveness to the body of work as a whole.

In spite of the fact that ideas may be difficult to define in concrete terms, and that even when they are defined, they may continue to evolve and change as the work itself does, it was a common pedagogical practice in the AP classrooms profiled for students to be asked to list potential ideas at the start of the year, for review and discussion with their teacher. While this mandate lends structure to a process that could be intimidatingly open-ended, it is also somewhat at odds with the observations that respondents made about the ways that creative work unfolds.

Related to this process of vetting ideas were participant (especially teacher) notions of what constitutes a "good" idea—"good" being the quality that the teacher would search for in reviewing students' brainstormed lists. Initial commentary, especially from the perspectives of readers and teachers, referred to qualities of originality in describing strong ideas: encouraging students to pursue ideas that had not been explored by hundreds of students before them. Students themselves also noted this aversion to "overdone" ideas. As respondents expanded on their initial comments, however, several reasoned that these "trite" or "overdone" ideas could certainly be pursued in new ways, and that the true reason that clichéd bodies of work fell flat

was not necessarily that they were unoriginal, but that they were under-explored or under-developed. At the core, truly good ideas seemed to be characterized by this potential for investigation, as well as personal relevance to the artist him- or herself.

Meaningful ideas. That quality of personal relevance made up the basis of meaning in students' Sustained Investigations. Their ideas and work were meaningful in the extent to which the student was personally invested in the work. Students might pursue meaning by working with an idea of personal significance, as mentioned, by making emotionally resonant work, and by developing their own habits and sensibilities as artists while building this body of work. For some students, the Sustained Investigation presented an opportunity to feel themselves fully step into and embody the role of artist for the first time: declaring their seriousness and dedication, and recognizing their own vision.

Furthermore, students built meaning both in the definition of their ideas and in their processes of pursuing them. They often purposefully selected media and techniques that aligned with qualities of the ideas that they wished to convey, and some described pausing to experiment with media and processes as an ongoing habit. In doing so, they searched for new ways to explore their ideas in purposeful ways. Writing was a divisive element of process for students: for some, it served to clarify the meaning of their work as it developed, but for others it was an extra step, and they wrote artists' statements only because they were required, not to inform their own understanding or thinking about their work.

Successful meaningful ideas. Participant comments reflected an acknowledgement that the development of meaningful work and the development of successful work represented two closely related, but separate, sets of criteria. Success was partially defined by all participants as

representing a significant challenge, especially in holding high standards for technical excellence and pushing oneself to create work that might test the limits of one's capabilities.

The roles of a range of audiences informed participants' views of success as well. Students generally acknowledged readers as an audience for their work, but most indicated that they did not select their work's content with a reader audience in mind; in other words, they did not select ideas in anticipation of which may garner a higher score. Interestingly, however, some students did point to the influence of the scoring process on the level of ambition they had for their work. While they created their Sustained Investigation work on their own terms and according to their own personal criteria for meaning, some acknowledged that if the work had been truly only for themselves, they would not have worked at the pace or the scale that they did. Strikingly, while students were generally adamant about making their work on their own terms rather than to meet perceived outside expectations, several spoke of developing their written artists' statements entirely with these outside expectations in mind. Several described removing references to personal experiences, feelings, or elements of process, out of an assumption that readers would not be interested in reading such reflections. Readers detected these omissions and commented that they often wished students would share more about their experiences of creating their work, rather than providing "definitions" of techniques, processes, or compositional choices in their statements. In the words of one reader, "they leave out all the good stuff."

Teachers played a more limited role as an audience—that is, they did not necessarily have their own terms by which student work should be created, or their own separate criteria for its success—but they served to reinforce the other two audiences of student and reader, by helping students to clarify their own intentions and making the scoring processes and criteria clear. Only one teacher purposefully removed references to readers or scoring processes from her

classroom, out of fear that it would inhibit students in developing their work. Teachers and students both tended to describe the teacher role as one of counselor, coach, facilitator, or even collaborator in the development of the Sustained Investigation.

Finally, students were themselves a clear and central audience for their work, and all participants, including readers, reinforced the idea that students should consider themselves their work's primary audience. Regardless of what the Sustained Investigation is about conceptually, they argued that it should primarily be *about* the student him- or herself: it should relate deeply to his or her own life and interests. At the arts magnet school in particular, students drew a distinction between the Sustained Investigation and truly personal, self-driven work, describing the latter as work that could be pursued purely for enjoyment, and that need not necessarily be conceptually rigorous. They spoke of their eagerness to return to creating this type of work over the summer: work that was clearly personally meaningful, but to which they applied different criteria for that meaning, and for success.

Conclusions

This study was driven by research questions relating to the role of each participant in the AP Sustained Investigation—students, teachers, and readers—and their perspectives on the notions of idea, investigation, and meaning. The study's three sub-questions are reiterated below, with summaries of the conclusions that can be drawn from the data associated with each participant type.

The first sub-question was: How do students describe the formulation and evolution of the ideas present in their work, and which aspects of these ideas and work are most personally meaningful? The word *evolution* was embedded in the question itself, and this evolutionary

nature of artmaking was central to students' understanding and expression of what it means to pursue an idea as an artist. They described processes of continually defining and clarifying their own ideas, and spoke of the necessity of changing course when needed, describing this as a vital part of the process of creating. While students described a more intuitive process of beginning a work without a clear idea of where it would lead, and others worked in a somewhat more planned manner, all described the investigation process as one that changed and deepened their work as time went on.

Student descriptions of the meaning of their work very consistently had to do with the way that work related to themselves as artists. Many spoke of the necessity of personal investment in one's ideas, and several students gave examples of changing their minds about initial ideas because they were not personally invested enough in them. Many pursued ideas that directly reflected their own lives and experiences—interpersonal relationships, dreams, the experience of leaving home, experience of trauma, growing up in the city—and all could speak to the personal resonance of the ideas that they pursued. In addition to the ideas of focus, many students found meaning and developed their self-knowledge as artists in their choices of processes and methods for pursuing their ideas, and this was at least as meaningful as the ideas themselves. Students spoke consistently of wanting to make work that represented them and their point of view, and described the process of discovery and ownership of their own processes, preferences, and motivations as artists; being able to say, in James's words, "that's just what I do now." Through idea and through process, they wanted to see themselves in their work.

Students also found meaning and purpose in undertaking a challenge in their Sustained Investigations, both in terms of technical polish and conceptual rigor. They wanted to produce their best work, and several challenged themselves to elevate their practice and make work that

was new and surprising even to them. In some cases, the structure of the AP portfolio process gave students the motivation to take on more challenging work than they would have pursued solely on their own terms. While most students reported that they were not especially preoccupied with the readers as an audience for their work, most did convey that they wanted their work to communicate and resonate with an audience, especially an audience of their peers. They found pride and motivation in creating work that was both admired and understood by those around them.

The next sub-question related to the teacher perspective: How do teachers describe the process of guiding students in generating and refining ideas in their Sustained Investigation work, and what informs their views on what constitutes a successful idea? On the whole, teacher perspectives were aligned with students in their conviction that successful ideas must necessarily be personally relevant ideas. From the point of view of most teachers, successful ideas required deep personal interest and engagement, because this enabled students to pursue them deeply and with purpose. As noted above, several teachers and readers spoke about the dangers of trite or clichéd ideas but reasoned that such ideas were not inherently bad as much as they were typically under-explored or under-developed.

The role that teachers most frequently self-identified with was one of coach or facilitator of the process: a sounding board to help students to clarify and refine their ideas. Their most frequently cited interactions with students were one-on-one conversations; in order to facilitate this process, it was necessary for teachers to know students, and their interests and processes, on an individual level. Their comments reflected a fine balance between the ability to provide specific recommendations and guidance for the next stages of student work, while ensuring that the work still reflected the true intentions of the student. Sometimes their feedback came in the

form of directing experimentation: Sarah, for example, noticed her student was adept at manipulating light and shadow in her photography, but that she struggled to find subject matter, so she directed her to spend an afternoon taking photos at the church connected to their school, just to see what happened. In other cases, a straightforward teacher observation took work in new directions: as Olivia playfully crawled inside the soft-sculpture house she had created, Mitch observed that it could easily be a wearable piece, and then suddenly it was. Facilitating, then, becomes a matter of noticing and amplifying the interesting aspects of what students are already pursuing. In providing such encouragement to students, teachers explained that they were hoping to enable them to trust themselves as artists in navigating their own ideas—in Rachel's words, students often need to "just make it and see what happens."

Just as most students looked to the Sustained Investigation as an opportunity to take on a challenge, teachers also expected students to challenge themselves in this work. Most teachers touched on notions of mastery of materials and process, and of the portfolio as an opportunity for students to showcase what they are capable of as artists. They also related this idea of challenge to the notion of investigation. The dual nature of challenge was that students must be clearly pursuing something in a thoughtful way, and that visual pursuit must also be well-executed. They balanced this expectation with the knowledge that students and readers also shared, that the process of artmaking is inherently fluid: ideas change, and artists pursue new avenues of expression of those ideas as well. Mitch spoke of this as a "tightrope" between continuity and variety—or between this evolution and the visual expression of a singular clear avenue of investigation. In reflecting on this notion of challenge, and the expectation of challenge as an aspect of student work, teachers commented on their dual role as a stand-in for readers. Some embraced this identity and used the AP scoring guidelines to inform class discussion. In doing

so, they built reader expectations into the definitions of success in their classrooms. Other teachers, most notably Rachel, purposefully distanced herself and her students from such expectations, emphasizing that student work needed to be successful primarily on their own terms.

Finally, the third sub-question related to the reader role: How do APSA portfolio evaluators (readers) describe the hallmarks of a conceptually rigorous portfolio, and what informs those ideas? In their comments, readers commented extensively on the notion of investigation (as opposed to idea) as it relates to process. They described successful Sustained Investigations as being visually related without matching: work that reflected an active and ongoing pursuit of ideas and meaning, involving research, and experimentation. This segment of the portfolio is, in Fred's words, the opportunity to take an idea and "work it to death until you've exhausted all the possibilities." Their comments on trite or cliché work echoed those of teachers, and reflected a point of view that trite-seeming ideas could still be explored with great depth and nuance.

Readers reinforced the idea that students should strive to make work that is personally meaningful, and were deeply interested in finding aspects of the student him- or herself reflected in their work. They lamented the somewhat detached nature of much student writing as it did not give insight into this process and personal investment.

Readers also commented on a seemingly artificial division between technical and conceptual concerns; some argued that educators teach as if media and idea are separate considerations, but in reality they are always intertwined. Masterful portfolios, in their view, capitalize on these connections and use them to inform and strengthen one another. They also reasoned that conceptual concerns do not necessarily have to take the lead in creating works of

art. Stephanie explained that the process of creation does not have to be "this profound thing," meaning that it can be productive to begin by simply making something, and to grapple with its meaning or content as an ongoing process in the completion and resolution of the work. Most other readers touched on this idea as well, of the role of creating in clarifying meaning.

Educational Implications

This research arose from my interest in and curiosity about the slippery nature of defining and describing ideas in the context of artmaking. I undertook what became the first pilot study after hearing AP students and teachers refer to the Sustained Investigation as the most challenging component of the APSA portfolio. This was initially surprising, as it is bound by so few rules: what could be so challenging about pursuing *whatever you want*? I came to understand that this open-endedness is the heart of the challenge, as it requires students, possibly for the first time, to negotiate their own perspectives on meaning and purpose in artmaking, and to grapple with the real or perceived expectations of others for their work. As stated in the opening chapter, my intention for this study has been to examine a breadth of experiences and perspectives of teachers, students, and readers, on creative ideation and investigation as it relates to the Sustained Investigation. My goal was not to arrive at a single framework of the ideal terms for conceptualizing these ideas and processes, but rather to expand practitioner interpretations of what might constitute a worthwhile idea for artistic pursuit, and broaden the pathways of practice to guide students toward and through such ideas.

The pedagogical conundrum at the heart of this work is not only the question of what makes a "good" idea, and what respondents mean by that, but also: how do we teach students to get ideas, and what does it mean to pursue them? The findings of this study suggest that the

answer, or new pedagogical considerations, at least, may come from re-examining the notion of ideas as they relate to meaning. Ideas in the context of this study were examined as the central, usually somewhat conceptual, organizer for a body of work: ideas were described by all participants as what the work was *about*. Students, and all participants, acknowledged that ideas may be conceptualized in a number of ways, ranging from subject matter to emotional expression to political or social commentary. While their comments reflected that these "good" ideas can take many forms, they also acknowledged that ideas were difficult to arrive at, and that a body of work's true about-ness often emerged over time, as the work developed. Students and readers especially noted the common need to begin by creating and consider meaning as a secondary step. In spite of this reality, many students were required to identify their potential core ideas as a first step in making their work.

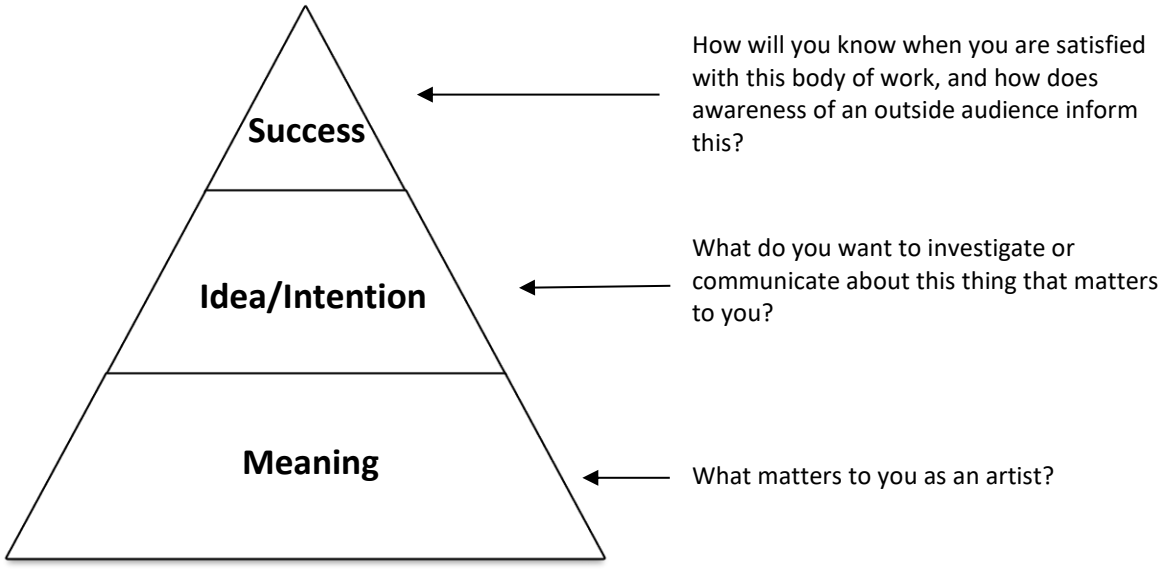
Meaning, as the term was used in this study, related to the aspects of an idea that made it valuable and worth pursuing to the student. Meaning often related to the relationship of the idea and the developing work to the artist him- or herself; it was described earlier as the extent to which, and manners in which, the student was reflected in the work—including both the idea itself and the technical and expressive choices made in the ways the idea was pursued. Students learned to become fluent in the language of ideas as their work developed, but it can be argued that the true core of many Sustained Investigations related to meaning more than idea: students were deeply motivated to make work that was a true reflection of themselves.

I present this juxtaposition of meaning and idea because the findings here suggest that the Sustained Investigation is often facilitated in classrooms as if idea is the foundation of practice, rather than meaning. A pedagogical implication of this study is that it might be worth considering the possibilities of approaching the Sustained Investigation through a lens of

meaning as a foundation for one's work, rather than ideas. Approaching this work through an entry point of meaning might mean that students are initially prompted to think about what matters to them as artists, and to identify the qualities of the work that they are interested in pursuing. These qualities might relate to conceptual concerns, but they might also relate to techniques and processes that they would like to engage with. In the process of making some initial work that addresses these aspects of meaning, students might begin to clarify their thinking on the central ideas or about-ness of their work. Such an approach might not only honor student interests and preferences as artists, but would allow their practices to parallel those of many professional artists, who describe ideas as emergent, rather than pre-determined. Instead of beginning with ideas, or an articulation of what they would like to investigate or communicate, students would work from aspects of meaning, or a reflection on what most matters to them as artists, and use these thoughts as points of departure from which to potentially develop ideas.

Figure 7

Proposed Hierarchy of Sustained Investigation Considerations



Beginning with meaning, and with making, might also more easily allow for the plurality of intentions that the student artists acknowledged were naturally present in their work. It would also allow students to more readily embrace the phase of not-knowing described by many artists as the phase of making where ideas have yet to be fully clarified. It allows for initial ideas or intentions to serve as points of departure that may change or be replaced as the work's core about-ness is identified.

The public school APSA course featured in this study, led by Rachel, offers an illustration of practice that most closely relates to this model. Whereas other teachers had students name and list potential ideas at the beginning of the year, Rachel's students identified what interested and motivated them as artists, in images (including Pinterest boards) as often as in words. When choosing their ideas, most of her students felt that the most important question was one of personal investment: they should simply make the work that they felt they needed to make, and develop ideas from this foundation of making. Success was considered in relation to the degree that meaning and idea had been effectively realized. In this model, success might necessarily become a consideration for later in the process, as it allows for the possibility of initial artwork to be somewhat underdeveloped, or potentially derivative of other sources, until ideas and intentions are fully formed.

Idea-definition as an ongoing and iterative process amplifies the importance of elaboration and reflection as essential teacher practices in the APSA course—habits that all of the teachers, and most readers, identified as central to the pedagogy of the Sustained Investigation. Guiding students becomes a matter of asking questions, making suggestions, and clarifying their intentions as the work develops.

This proposed model for considering and approaching the Sustained Investigation attaches a structure and intentionality to aspects of practice—both creative practice and pedagogical practice—that already emerge naturally as hallmarks of experience in navigating the Sustained Investigation.

It is worth considering the educational implications of this work beyond the realm of artmaking as well. In undertaking the Sustained Investigation, students developed their own visual languages and processes, but moreover, they identified and developed ideas of personal interest. They set the terms by which those ideas would be explored and established personal metrics of success in this pursuit. Such work reflects goals not only of quality art education but of quality education in general: the work was rigorous, engaging, and student-centered, and all participants, including teachers and readers, maintained this student-oriented focus. Student enthusiasm for the Sustained Investigation signals to teachers that they are up for the challenge, even though this work often represents a considerable departure from the assignment-driven work that likely preceded it. The depth of student practice validates art-based research *as* research—as an authentic pursuit of understanding—that may be considered alongside of self-structured investigations that they might undertake in a science lab or history classroom. Furthermore, pedagogical practice that guides the development of the Sustained Investigation, particularly the habits of ongoing coaching and reflection, may serve as models for facilitating student-driven work in other course areas.

Relatedly, this work revealed that this student engagement was occasionally experienced to an extreme degree: at the magnet school in particular, students spoke of being invested in their work to the point of feeling drained; they looked forward to creating work over the summer that did not have to carry conceptual meaning. It reveals that a facet of artistic self-knowledge may

be testing one's own stamina. Students outside of this school site similarly related the degree of challenge to the degree of value of the work. If the level of intensity of their work was not sustainable long-term, they had deemed it to be worthwhile within a defined span of time. This, too, carries implications beyond the world of art teaching and learning: students learned that ambitious pursuits may not always be enjoyable, but that they can be consistently meaningful and worth the effort. They developed a comfort with the idea of occasional *dis*comfort in the pursuit of meaningful work. They began to understand the rhythm of this work, particularly the need to pause, reflect, and occasionally shift gears.

Implications for Further Research

Although this study focused on a highly specific experience of artmaking—developing a Sustained Investigation in the context of the AP Studio Art course and portfolio—the examination of this process necessitated a review of research related to three different types of practice: the processes of professional artists, adolescent artistic development, and contemporary pedagogical practice at the secondary level. The gaps in the literature revealed by this study, along with the findings of this research, raise new questions about each of these populations that could be pursued in further research.

APSA students and teachers embraced the opportunity to develop and present work as "real" artists do, and further research into professional artistic practice as it relates to both classroom practice and to adolescent artmaking priorities could serve to strengthen and clarify this motivation. The literature review revealed the existence of surprisingly few robust studies on the habits and practices of a range of professional artists as it relates to ideation and investigation; there are especially few that do not fall into the category of creativity research,

which is undertaken with originality and invention as an assumed priority for creation. Specifically, studies of artistic practice as a process-event might offer teachers, students, and fellow artists better frameworks for understanding the stages or features of ongoing idea-generation and -definition as a component of artistic practice.

Literature on adolescent artmaking often draws a sharp distinction between in-school work and out-of-school work. In-school work is commonly identified as teacher-driven, technique-focused, and of little meaning to students, while students' outside work is described as personally meaningful but often not supported by teachers, because it is out of step with their expectations in terms of style or content. The work featured in this study reveals the possibility that inherently student-driven and meaningful work may be produced in the classroom. This work would be strengthened by further research on adolescent ideation and meaning-making in the classroom context, and specific pedagogical practices, perhaps including and beyond the habits of reflection and elaboration that have been identified here, as tools that can enable the creation of this personally valuable work.

This study also points to the need for further investigation into the pedagogy of ideation and investigation in contemporary art classrooms. In particular, broader surveys of the relationship of idea, meaning, and success would enable a more stable shared vocabulary and set of common understandings as to what it might mean to pursue an idea, and what makes that pursuit worthwhile, and specific pedagogical structures that might enable effective habits of problem-finding and meaning-making.

In pursuing this study, I realized that my investigation centered on the interconnected nature of idea, meaning, and success as they apply to artmaking, and that, as noted above, meaning was in many ways the foundation. The presence of each of these three elements is

clearly evident in my interview protocols, and in early planning documents and proposal materials, but I did not fully understand this work as the interplay of those elements until quite late in the process of analysis. My experience as a researcher, then, was not altogether different from the creative process of the artists I worked with, who observed again and again that ideas only fully present themselves through the work, not beforehand. With the benefit of this clarity now, however, I would like to further examine the relationship between the pursuit of meaning and the clarification of ideas among student artists, and the ways that structures like the AP Studio Art portfolio can enable, rather than hinder, the pursuit of creative ideation, investigation, and meaning-making.

Findings from this study indicate that the AP structure enabled a certain depth of artistic pursuit, as it motivated students not only to define the kinds of work that they found to be worth pursuing, but also inspired a degree of ambition in the manner by which they pursued their ideas. I was struck by the nature of student commentary about the readers as an audience: most of them staunchly denied that this audience influenced their approach to ideation and creativity at all—that students were their own primary audience—but then just as readily, several admitted to pushing themselves harder for this audience than they would have just for themselves. I posited that it was the evaluation process that sparked this ambition, but perhaps they were motivated by other aspects of the experience—for example, the act of introducing themselves to this nationwide community of artists beyond their classroom's walls. These findings invite new and closer inquiry into the sources of ideas and meaning in student art, but the relationship between personal meaning and the presence of a variety of outside audiences in enabling a depth of creative pursuit. In designing this study, I deliberately avoided discussion of the value or role of assessment on adolescent artmaking, as these questions could form the basis of several studies on

their own. This notion of audience, however, rather than assessment in particular, might provide a nuanced and productive lens for relating evaluation to the pursuit and presence of meaning in one's work.

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APPENDIX A

Informed Consent: Parent (of students under 18)

Protocol Title: Artmaking as Inquiry: The Sustained Investigation in Advanced Placement Studio Art Parent/Guardian Informed Consent
Principal Researcher: Amy Charleroy 410-812-8872, ac3708@tc.columbia.edu

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INTRODUCTION
Your child is invited to participate in this research study called "Artmaking as Inquiry: The Sustained Investigation in Advanced Placement Studio Art." Your child may qualify to take part in this research study because they are enrolled in an AP Studio Art course and are developing a "sustained investigation" body of work as a part of that experience. Approximately twenty participants, including twelve AP Studio Art students, will participate in this study, and it will take ninety minutes of your child's time to complete.

WHY IS THIS STUDY BEING DONE?
This study is being done to determine similarities and differences between the ways that AP Studio Art teachers, students, and portfolio reviewers describe the development of artistic ideas as a part of the Sustained Investigation section of the AP portfolio.

WHAT WILL MY CHILD BE ASKED TO DO IF I AGREE THAT MY CHILD CAN TAKE PART IN THIS STUDY?
If you decide to allow your child to take part in this study, the primary researcher will individually interview your child. This interview will be about ninety minutes in length, and will be conducted online via Skype. It will take place outside of class time or after the end of the school year, so as not to impinge on classroom time in any way. The interview will be scheduled at a time that is convenient for your child between the months of May and July 2019, after his/her AP portfolio has been completed and submitted.

During the interview your child will be asked to discuss their experiences building their AP Studio Art portfolio, with particular emphasis on the decisions that they made when developing the Sustained Investigation portion of the portfolio.

This interview will be audio-recorded. If you do not wish your child to be audio-recorded, your child will not be able to participate. During the individual interview, the researcher will notify your child when the audio-recorder is started and stopped. After the recorded interview is written down the original recording will be deleted. Your child will be given a pseudonym or false name in order to keep their identity confidential.

WHAT POSSIBLE RISKS OR DISCOMFORTS CAN MY CHILD EXPECT FROM TAKING PART IN THIS STUDY?
This is a minimal risk study, which means the harms or discomforts that your child may experience are not greater than your child would ordinarily encounter in daily life while taking routine physical or psychological examinations or tests. However, there are some risks to consider. Your child might feel embarrassed to discuss aspects of their work or the development of their portfolio. However, your child does not have to answer any questions or divulge anything they do not want to talk about. Your child can stop participating in the study at any time without penalty. The primary researcher is taking

precautions to keep your information confidential and prevent anyone from discovering or guessing your identity, such as using a pseudonym instead of your name and keeping all information on a password protected computer and locked in a file drawer.

WHAT POSSIBLE BENEFITS CAN MY CHILD EXPECT FROM TAKING PART IN THIS STUDY?

There is no direct benefit to your child for participating in this study. Participation may benefit the field of teacher education to better understand strategies for discussing the Sustained Investigation, or other student-directed work, in the classroom.

WILL MY CHILD BE PAID FOR BEING IN THIS STUDY?

Your child will not be paid to participate in this study.

WHEN IS THE STUDY OVER? CAN MY CHILD LEAVE THE STUDY BEFORE IT ENDS?

The study is over when your child has completed the individual interview. However, your child can leave the study at any time even if they have not finished.

PROTECTION OF YOUR CHILD'S CONFIDENTIALITY

The primary researcher will keep all written materials locked in a desk drawer in a locked office. Any electronic or digital information (including audio recordings) will be stored on a computer that is password protected. What is on the audio-recording will be written down and the audio-recording will then be destroyed. There will be no record matching your child's real name with their pseudonym. Data will be kept for a period of two years after it is collected.

For quality assurance, the study team, the study sponsor (grant agency), and/or members of the Teachers College Institutional Review Board (IRB) may review the data collected from you as part of this study. Otherwise, all information obtained from your participation in this study will be held strictly confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission or as required by U.S. or State law.

HOW WILL THE RESULTS BE USED?

The results of this study will be published in journals and presented at academic conferences. Your child's identity will be removed from any data your child provides before publication or use for educational purposes. Your child's name or any identifying information about your child will not be published. This study is being conducted as part of the dissertation of the primary researcher.

CONSENT FOR AUDIO RECORDING

Audio is part of this research study. You can choose whether to give permission for your child to be recorded. If you decide that you do not wish your child be recorded, **they will not be able to participate** in this research study.

_____I give my consent for my child to be recorded _____

Signature

_____I **do not** consent for my child to be recorded _____

Signature

WHO MAY VIEW MY CHILD'S PARTICIPATION IN THIS STUDY

___I consent to allow my child's audio-recorded materials viewed at an educational setting or at a conference outside of Teachers College, Columbia University

_____

Signature

___I **do not** consent to allow my child's audio-recorded materials viewed outside of Teachers College, Columbia University

_____

Signature

WHO CAN ANSWER MY QUESTIONS ABOUT THIS STUDY?

If you have any questions about the study or your child's taking part in this research study, you should contact the primary researcher, Amy Charleroy, at ac3708@tc.columbia.edu or 410-812-8872. You can also contact the faculty advisor, Dr. Mary Hafeli, at mary.hafeli@tc.columbia.edu.

If you have questions or concerns about your child's rights as a research subject, you should contact the Institutional Review Board (IRB) (the human research ethics committee) at 212-678-4105 or email IRB@tc.edu or you can write to the IRB at Teachers College, Columbia University, 525 W. 120th Street, New York, NY 10027, Box 151. The IRB is the committee that oversees human research protection at Teachers College, Columbia University.

PARTICIPANT'S RIGHTS

- I have read the (Guardian) Parental Permission Form and have been offered the opportunity to discuss the form with the researcher.
- I have had ample opportunity to ask questions about the purposes, procedures, risks and benefits regarding this research study.
- I understand that my child's participation is voluntary. I may refuse to allow my child to participate or withdraw participation at any time without penalty.
- The researcher may withdraw my child from the research at their professional discretion.
- If, during the course of the study, significant new information that has been developed becomes available which may relate to my willingness to allow my child to continue participation, the researcher will provide this information to me.
- Any information derived from the research study that personally identifies me or my child will not be voluntarily released or disclosed without my separate consent, except as specifically required by law.
- Your child's data will not be used in further research studies.
- I should receive a copy of this (Guardian) Parental Permission Form document.

My signature means that I agree to allow my child to participate in this study:

Print Parent or guardian's name: _____

Parent or guardian's signature: _____

Child's name: _____

Date: _____

APPENDIX B

Student Assent (Under Age 18)

Assent Form for Minors

Protocol Title: Artmaking as Inquiry: The Sustained Investigation in Advanced Placement Studio Art

Principal Investigator: Amy Charleroy 410-812-8872, ac3708@tc.columbia.edu

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My name is Amy Charleroy. I am trying to learn more about students' processes of creating their work for the Sustained Investigation portion of the AP Studio Art portfolio.

I am asking you to be in this study you are working on, or have recently completed, an AP Studio Art portfolio including a Sustained Investigation. I hope to have 16 children like you in this research.

If you are in the research, this is what will happen: I will interview you once about the process of creating your Sustained Investigation work. I will ask you to tell me about your process of creating that work and about some of your ideas behind it. I will record this conversation.

The research will take about 90 minutes of your time, in one interview that we will hold over Skype or FaceTime. I do not think you personally will be helped by being in this study, but I could learn something that will help other students and teachers navigating the AP Studio Art course in the future. You might feel embarrassed to discuss aspects of your work or the development of their portfolio. However, you do not have to answer any questions or divulge anything you do not want to talk about.

Both you and your parent/guardian must agree to you being in the study. Even if your parent or guardian says yes, you may still say no, and that is okay.

You do not have to be in this study if you do not want to. Nothing bad will happen to you if you say no now or change your mind later after starting the study. You just need to tell me if you want to stop being in the study. I will ask you later if you want to stop or if you want to keep going. It's okay to say yes or no.

I will keep the information I collect for the study safe and secure. I will not share information that has your name on it with people who are not part of the research team, unless we have to.

If you have questions, you can contact the researcher, Amy Charleroy, at 410-812-8872 or ac3708@tc.columbia.edu. You may also contact the faculty sponsor for this research, Dr. Mary Hafeli, at mary.hafeli@tc.columbia.edu. If you want to talk to someone else besides the researcher or sponsor, you may contact the Teachers College Institutional Review Board (IRB) at 212-678-4105 or by email at IRB@tc.edu.

Assent Statement

I_____ (child's name) agree to be in this study,

titled_____

_____.

What I am being asked to do has been explained to me by _____.

I understand what I am being asked to do and I know that if I have any questions, I can ask

_____ at any time. I know that I can quit this study whenever I want to and it is perfectly OK to do so. It won't be a problem for anyone if I decide to quit.

Name: _____

Signature: _____

Witness Name: _____

Date: _____

APPENDIX C

Informed Consent: Student (18 and over)

Student Consent form (Age 18+)
Principal Researcher: Amy Charleroy, Teachers College, Columbia University
410-812-8872, ac3708@tc.columbia.edu

INTRODUCTION You are invited to participate in this research study called "Artmaking as Inquiry: The Sustained Investigation in Advanced Placement Studio Art." You may qualify to take part in this research study because you are enrolled in an AP Studio Art course and are developing a "sustained investigation" body of work as a part of that experience. Approximately twenty participants, including twelve AP Studio Art students, will participate in this study, and it will take ninety minutes of your time to complete.

WHY IS THIS STUDY BEING DONE?
This study is being done to determine similarities and differences between the ways that AP Studio Art teachers, students, and portfolio reviewers describe the development of artistic ideas as a part of the Sustained Investigation section of the AP portfolio.

WHAT WILL I BE ASKED TO DO IF I AGREE TO TAKE PART IN THIS STUDY?
If you decide to take part in this study, the primary researcher will interview you individually. This interview will be about ninety minutes in length, and will be conducted online via Skype. It will take place outside of class time or after the end of the school year, so as not to impinge on classroom time in any way. The interview will be scheduled at a time that is convenient for you between the months of May and July 2019, after your AP portfolio has been completed and submitted.
During the interview you will be asked to discuss your experiences building your AP Studio Art portfolio, with particular emphasis on the decisions that you made when developing the Sustained Investigation portion of the portfolio.
This interview will be conducted via Skype and will be audio-recorded. During the interview, the researcher will notify you when the audio-recorder is started and stopped. After the audio-recording is written down (transcribed) the audio-recording will be deleted. If you do not wish to be audio-recorded, you will not be able to participate. You will be given a pseudonym or false name/de-identified code in order to keep your identity confidential.

WHAT POSSIBLE RISKS OR DISCOMFORTS CAN I EXPECT FROM TAKING PART IN THIS STUDY?
This is a minimal risk study, which means the harms or discomforts that you may experience are not greater than you would ordinarily encounter in daily life while taking routine physical or psychological examinations or tests. However, there are some risks to consider. You might feel embarrassed to discuss aspects of your work or the development of your portfolio. However, you do not have to answer any questions or divulge anything you do not want to talk about. You can stop participating in the study at any time without penalty. The primary researcher is taking precautions to keep your information confidential and prevent anyone from discovering or guessing your identity, such as using a pseudonym instead of your name and keeping all information on a password protected computer and locked in a file drawer.

WHAT POSSIBLE BENEFITS CAN I EXPECT FROM TAKING PART IN THIS STUDY?
There is no direct benefit to your participation in this study. Participation may benefit the field of teacher education to better understand strategies for discussing the Sustained Investigation, or other student-directed work, in the classroom.

WILL I BE PAID FOR BEING IN THIS STUDY?
Participants will not be paid for their involvement in this study, and there are no costs to you for taking part in this study.

WHEN IS THE STUDY OVER? CAN I LEAVE THE STUDY BEFORE IT ENDS?
The study is over when you have completed the individual interview. However, you can leave the study at any time even if you have not finished.

PROTECTION OF YOUR CONFIDENTIALITY
The primary researcher will keep all written materials locked in a desk drawer in a locked office. Any electronic or digital information (including audio recordings) will be stored on a computer that is password protected. What is on the audio-recording will be written down and the audio-recording will then be destroyed. There will be no record matching your real name with your pseudonym. Data will be kept for a period of two years after it is collected.
For quality assurance, the study team, the study sponsor (grant agency), and/or members of the Teachers College Institutional Review Board (IRB) may review the data collected from you as part of this study. Otherwise, all information obtained from your participation in this study will be held strictly confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission or as required by U.S. or State law.

HOW WILL THE RESULTS BE USED?
The results of this study will be published in journals and presented at academic conferences. Your identity will be removed from any data you provide before publication or use for educational purposes. Your name or any identifying information about you will not be published. This study is being conducted as part of the dissertation of the primary researcher.

CONSENT FOR AUDIO RECORDING
Audio recording is part of this research study. You can choose whether to give permission to be recorded. If you decide that you don't wish to be recorded, **you will not be able to participate** in this research study.

_____I give my consent to be recorded

_____
Signature

_____I **do not** consent to be recorded

_____
Signature

WHO MAY VIEW MY PARTICIPATION IN THIS STUDY

___I consent to allow audio-recorded materials viewed at an educational setting or at a conference outside of Teachers College, Columbia University

_____

Signature

___I **do not** consent to allow audio-recorded materials viewed outside of Teachers College, Columbia University

_____

Signature

WHO CAN ANSWER MY QUESTIONS ABOUT THIS STUDY?

If you have any questions about taking part in this research study, you should contact the primary researcher, Amy Charleroy, at ac3708@tc.columbia.edu or 410-812-8872. You can also contact the faculty advisor, Dr. Mary Hafeli, at mary.hafeli@tc.columbia.edu.

If you have questions or concerns about your rights as a research subject, you should contact the Institutional Review Board (IRB) (the human research ethics committee) at 212-678-4105 or email IRB@tc.edu or you can write to the IRB at Teachers College, Columbia University, 525 W. 120th Street, New York, NY 10027, Box 151. The IRB is the committee that oversees human research protection for Teachers College, Columbia University.

PARTICIPANT'S RIGHTS

- I have read the Informed Consent Form and have been offered the opportunity to discuss the form with the researcher.
- I have had ample opportunity to ask questions about the purposes, procedures, risks and benefits regarding this research study.
- I understand that my participation is voluntary. I may refuse to participate or withdraw participation at any time without penalty.
- The researcher may withdraw me from the research at their professional discretion.
- If, during the course of the study, significant new information that has been developed becomes available which may relate to my willingness to continue my participation, the researcher will provide this information to me.
- Any information derived from the research study that personally identifies me will not be voluntarily released or disclosed without my separate consent, except as specifically required by law.
- Your data will not be used in further research studies.
- I should receive a copy of the Informed Consent Form document.

My signature means that I agree to participate in this study:

Print name: _____ **Date**: _____

Signature: _____

APPENDIX D

Informed Consent: Teacher

Protocol Title: Artmaking as Inquiry: The Sustained Investigation in Advanced Placement Studio Art Teacher Informed Consent
Principal Researcher: Amy Charleroy, Teachers College, Columbia University
410-812-8872, ac3708@tc.columbia.edu

INTRODUCTION You are invited to participate in this research study called "Artmaking as Inquiry: The Sustained Investigation in Advanced Placement Studio Art." You may qualify to take part in this research study because you are a current AP Studio Art teacher and have guided students through the process of developing a sustained investigation.

Approximately twenty people will participate in this study and it will take 90 minutes of your time to complete.

WHY IS THIS STUDY BEING DONE?
This study is being done to determine similarities and differences between the ways that AP Studio Art teachers, students, and portfolio reviewers describe the development of artistic ideas as a part of the Sustained Investigation section of the AP portfolio.

WHAT WILL I BE ASKED TO DO IF I AGREE TO TAKE PART IN THIS STUDY?
If you decide to take part in this study, the primary researcher will interview you individually. This interview will be about ninety minutes in length, and will be conducted online via Skype. It will take place outside of class time or after the end of the school year, so as not to impinge on classroom time in any way. The interview will be scheduled at a time that is convenient for you between the months of May and July 2019, after your students' AP portfolios have been completed and submitted.

During the interview you will be asked to discuss your experiences in guiding students through the completion of the Sustained Investigation component of the AP Studio Art portfolio, specifically as it relates to identifying and developing ideas over the course of creating this body of work**.**
This interview will be conducted via Skype and will be audio-recorded. During the interview, the researcher will notify you when the audio-recorder is started and stopped. After the audio-recording is written down (transcribed) the audio-recording will be deleted. If you do not wish to be audio-recorded, you will not be able to participate. You will be given a pseudonym or false name/de-identified code in order to keep your identity confidential.

WHAT POSSIBLE RISKS OR DISCOMFORTS CAN I EXPECT FROM TAKING PART IN THIS STUDY?

This is a minimal risk study, which means the harms or discomforts that you may experience are not greater than you would ordinarily encounter in daily life while taking routine physical or psychological examinations or tests. However, there are some risks to consider. You might feel embarrassed to discuss aspects of student work or the development of their portfolios. However, you do not have to answer any questions or divulge anything you do not want to talk about. You can stop participating in the study at any time without penalty. You might feel concerned that things you say might get back to AP administrators or portfolio reviewers. The primary researcher is taking precautions to keep your information confidential and prevent anyone from discovering or guessing your identity, such as using a pseudonym instead of your name and keeping all information on a password protected computer and locked in a file drawer.

WHAT POSSIBLE BENEFITS CAN I EXPECT FROM TAKING PART IN THIS STUDY?
There is no direct benefit to your participation in this study. Participation may benefit the field of teacher education to better understand strategies for discussing the Sustained Investigation, or other student-directed work, in the classroom.

WILL I BE PAID FOR BEING IN THIS STUDY?
Participants will not be paid for their involvement in this study, and there are no costs to you for taking part in this study.

WHEN IS THE STUDY OVER? CAN I LEAVE THE STUDY BEFORE IT ENDS? The study is over when you have completed the individual interview. However, you can leave the study at any time even if you have not finished.

PROTECTION OF YOUR CONFIDENTIALITY
The primary researcher will keep all written materials locked in a desk drawer in a locked office. Any electronic or digital information (including audio recordings) will be stored on a computer that is password protected. What is on the audio-recording will be written down and the audio-recording will then be destroyed. There will be no record matching your child's real name with their pseudonym. Data will be kept for a period of two years after it is collected. For quality assurance, the study team, the study sponsor (grant agency), and/or members of the Teachers College Institutional Review Board (IRB) may review the data collected from you as part of this study. Otherwise, all information obtained from your participation in this study will be held strictly confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission or as required by U.S. or State law.

HOW WILL THE RESULTS BE USED?
The results of this study will be published in journals and presented at academic conferences. Your identity will be removed from any data you provide before publication or use for educational purposes. Your name or any identifying information about you will not be published. This study is being conducted as part of the dissertation of the primary researcher.

CONSENT FOR AUDIO RECORDING

Audio recording is part of this research study. You can choose whether to give permission to be recorded. If you decide that you don't wish to be recorded, **you will not be able to participate** in this research study.

_____I give my consent to be recorded

_____

Signature

_____I **do not** consent to be recorded

_____

Signature

WHO MAY VIEW MY PARTICIPATION IN THIS STUDY

___ I consent to allow audio-recorded materials viewed at an educational setting or at a conference outside of Teachers College, Columbia University

_____

Signature

___ I **do not** consent to allow audio-recorded materials viewed outside of Teachers College, Columbia University

_____

Signature

WHO CAN ANSWER MY QUESTIONS ABOUT THIS STUDY?

If you have any questions about taking part in this research study, you should contact the primary researcher, Amy Charleroy, at ac3708@tc.columbia.edu or 410-812-8872. You can also contact the faculty advisor, Dr. Mary Hafeli, at mary.hafeli@tc.columbia.edu.

If you have questions or concerns about your rights as a research subject, you should contact the Institutional Review Board (IRB) (the human research ethics committee) at 212-678-4105 or email IRB@tc.edu or you can write to the IRB at Teachers College, Columbia University, 525 W. 120th Street, New York, NY 10027, Box 151. The IRB is the committee that oversees human research protection for Teachers College, Columbia University.

PARTICIPANT'S RIGHTS

- I have read the Informed Consent Form and have been offered the opportunity to discuss the form with the researcher.
- I have had ample opportunity to ask questions about the purposes, procedures, risks and benefits regarding this research study.
- I understand that my participation is voluntary. I may refuse to participate or withdraw participation at any time without penalty.
- The researcher may withdraw me from the research at their professional discretion.
- If, during the course of the study, significant new information that has been developed becomes available which may relate to my willingness to continue my participation, the researcher will provide this information to me.
- Any information derived from the research study that personally identifies me will not be voluntarily released or disclosed without my separate consent, except as specifically required by law.
- Your data will not be used in further research studies.
- I should receive a copy of the Informed Consent Form document.

My signature means that I agree to participate in this study:

Print name: _____ **Date**: _____

Signature:

_____

APPENDIX E

Informed Consent: Reader

Protocol Title: Artmaking as Inquiry: The Sustained Investigation in Advanced Placement Studio Art
AP Reviewer ("Reader") Informed Consent
Principal Researcher: Amy Charleroy, Teachers College, Columbia University
410-812-8872, ac3708@tc.columbia.edu

INTRODUCTION
You are invited to participate in this research study called "Artmaking as Inquiry: The Sustained Investigation in Advanced Placement Studio Art." You may qualify to take part in this research study because you are a current "reader," or reviewer, of AP Studio Art portfolios and are familiar with the structure and purpose of the sustained investigation.
Approximately twenty people will participate in this study, including APSA teachers, students, and readers. Your participation will take 90 minutes of your time.

WHY IS THIS STUDY BEING DONE?
This study is being done to determine similarities and differences between the ways that AP Studio Art teachers, students, and portfolio reviewers describe the development of artistic ideas as a part of the Sustained Investigation section of the AP portfolio.

WHAT WILL I BE ASKED TO DO IF I AGREE TO TAKE PART IN THIS STUDY?
If you decide to take part in this study, the primary researcher will interview you individually. This interview will be about ninety minutes in length, and will be conducted online via Skype. It will take place outside of class time or after the end of the school year, so as not to impinge on classroom time in any way. The interview will be scheduled at a time that is convenient for you between the months of May and July 2019.
During the interview you will be asked to discuss your experiences in evaluating the Sustained Investigation component of the AP Studio Art portfolio, specifically as it reflects the development of student-directed ideas over time.
This interview will be conducted via Skype and will be audio-recorded. During the interview, the researcher will notify you when the audio-recorder is started and stopped. After the audio-recording is written down (transcribed) the audio-recording will be deleted. If you do not wish to be audio-recorded, you will not be able to participate. You will be given a pseudonym or false name/de-identified code in order to keep your identity confidential.

WHAT POSSIBLE RISKS OR DISCOMFORTS CAN I EXPECT FROM TAKING PART IN THIS STUDY?
This is a minimal risk study, which means the harms or discomforts that you may experience are not greater than you would ordinarily encounter in daily life while taking routine physical or psychological examinations or tests. However, there are some risks to consider. You might feel embarrassed to discuss aspects of student work or the qualities of their ideas. However, you do not have to answer any questions or divulge anything you do not want to talk about. You can stop participating in the study at any time without penalty. You might feel concerned that things you say might get back to AP administrators. The primary researcher is taking precautions to keep your information confidential and

prevent anyone from discovering or guessing your identity, such as using a pseudonym instead of your name and keeping all information on a password protected computer and locked in a file drawer.

WHAT POSSIBLE BENEFITS CAN I EXPECT FROM TAKING PART IN THIS STUDY?
There is no direct benefit to your participation in this study. Participation may benefit the field of teacher education to better understand strategies for discussing the Sustained Investigation, or other student-directed work, in the classroom.

WILL I BE PAID FOR BEING IN THIS STUDY?
Participants will not be paid for their involvement in this study, and there are no costs to you for taking part in this study.

WHEN IS THE STUDY OVER? CAN I LEAVE THE STUDY BEFORE IT ENDS? The study is over when you have completed the individual interview. However, you can leave the study at any time even if you have not finished.

PROTECTION OF YOUR CONFIDENTIALITY
The primary researcher will keep all written materials locked in a desk drawer in a locked office. Any electronic or digital information (including audio recordings) will be stored on a computer that is password protected. What is on the audio-recording will be written down and the audio-recording will then be destroyed. There will be no record matching your child's real name with their pseudonym. Data will be kept for a period of two years after it is collected.
For quality assurance, the study team, the study sponsor (grant agency), and/or members of the Teachers College Institutional Review Board (IRB) may review the data collected from you as part of this study. Otherwise, all information obtained from your participation in this study will be held strictly confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission or as required by U.S. or State law.

HOW WILL THE RESULTS BE USED?
The results of this study will be published in journals and presented at academic conferences. Your identity will be removed from any data you provide before publication or use for educational purposes. Your name or any identifying information about you will not be published. This study is being conducted as part of the dissertation of the primary researcher.

CONSENT FOR AUDIO RECORDING
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Signature

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_____
Signature

WHO MAY VIEW MY PARTICIPATION IN THIS STUDY

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_____

Signature

___I **do not** consent to allow audio-recorded materials viewed outside of Teachers College, Columbia University

_____

Signature

WHO CAN ANSWER MY QUESTIONS ABOUT THIS STUDY?

If you have any questions about taking part in this research study, you should contact the primary researcher, Amy Charleroy, at ac3708@tc.columbia.edu or 410-812-8872. You can also contact the faculty advisor, Dr. Mary Hafeli, at mary.hafeli@tc.columbia.edu.

If you have questions or concerns about your rights as a research subject, you should contact the Institutional Review Board (IRB) (the human research ethics committee) at 212-678-4105 or email IRB@tc.edu or you can write to the IRB at Teachers College, Columbia University, 525 W. 120th Street, New York, NY 10027, Box 151. The IRB is the committee that oversees human research protection for Teachers College, Columbia University.

PARTICIPANT'S RIGHTS

- I have read the Informed Consent Form and have been offered the opportunity to discuss the form with the researcher.
- I have had ample opportunity to ask questions about the purposes, procedures, risks and benefits regarding this research study.
- I understand that my participation is voluntary. I may refuse to participate or withdraw participation at any time without penalty.
- The researcher may withdraw me from the research at their professional discretion.
- If, during the course of the study, significant new information that has been developed becomes available which may relate to my willingness to continue my participation, the researcher will provide this information to me.
- Any information derived from the research study that personally identifies me will not be voluntarily released or disclosed without my separate consent, except as specifically required by law.
- Your data will not be used in further research studies.
- I should receive a copy of the Informed Consent Form document.

My signature means that I agree to participate in this study:

Print name: _____ **Date**: _____

Signature:
_____

APPENDIX F

Interview Protocol: Student

1. Opening questions:
    - What grade are you in/what year in school did you just complete?
    - Have you taken art classes throughout all of your high school years? Have you had [teacher's name] for any/all of these classes?
    - Have you taken the AP Studio Art course more than once? (Some students take the course twice, preparing a drawing for portfolio one year, for example, and a 2-D design portfolio the following year)

2. Describing the sustained investigation
    - How is the sustained investigation process structured in your class? Does everyone work on it at the same time?
    - When your teacher first described this section of the portfolio to you, How did he/she say about it? What was your initial reaction to that?
        - Did he/she give you any guidance in choosing a direction for your work? What advice did you get?

3. Process and intent
    - Can you tell me about the central idea of your sustained investigation?
        - What about that [idea, process, approach, etc – depending on what is being described] was interesting to you? Is it related to anything you have made before?
        - As you decided what you were going to do, are there any rules or guidelines you are setting for yourself about what makes a "good" concentration?
    - Tell me more about the work you made for your sustained investigation. Can you describe one or two pieces? **[OR: start with the first one – tell me about the first thing you made]**
        - Is there anything that you've made so far that you are especially happy with? What was interesting about this work?
        - Is there anything that you feel was not as successful as you'd hoped? Why is that?
    - One thing that makes the sustained investigation unique is that you aren't being asked to make just one work – you're being asked to extend an idea or interest of yours over twelve pieces.
        - Can you tell me about the process of making twelve separate pieces of art that relate to a single idea? How is your approach or idea similar or different across your work?
        - Why do you think that word investigation is used to describe this section? How have you investigated something over these twelve pieces?
    - Have you found yourself getting stuck at all during this process? What do you do then? [Ask follow-up questions about any actions that student shares].
        - Is there a time that this happened recently? Can you tell me about it?

- Did you ever find yourself changing your mind about anything as you worked, or getting new ideas? Tell me about what happened.

4. Independent artmaking
    - Do you make art on your own, outside of school?
    - If so, what kinds of things do you make?
        - How did you get interested in that?
    - Does that work relate to what you are thinking of pursuing for your concentration at all? Why or why not?

5. Intent/metrics of success
    - Looking back on the work you made in your sustained investigation, what are the most important aspects of this work, to you? Leaving the scoring process aside, what does it mean to you for this work to be successful?
    - If you were creating this concentration just as an assignment for this class, but you weren't sending out your portfolio to be reviewed and scored, do you think you would have chosen to make this same work for your concentration? Why or why not? [If no]: What else would you have made? Why did you decide not to go in that direction here?

APPENDIX G

Interview Protocol: Teacher

1. Opening questions:
   - How long have you been teaching AP Studio Art?
   - Can you explain to me how you structure the course, over the duration of the school year?

2. Describing the sustained investigation
   - Can you tell me how you describe the sustained investigation section to your students at the beginning of the year (or whenever it is introduced)?
     - Related/rephrasing of question: What are the most important aspects of the sustained investigation that you want students to understand?
     - And what are your students' initial reactions to the idea of the sustained investigation?
     - Typically, is there anything that particularly excites them or worries them when you introduce this as part of the portfolio?

3. Facilitating the sustained investigation process
   - How do your students get started on thinking about their sustained investigation work? What's the first thing you ask them to do?
     - [If teachers have set method or series of steps that they have students follow]: How did you arrive at this method for facilitating the process? What have you found about this process that's especially beneficial?
     - What happens after that?
     - [Teachers may begin speaking about idea-generation here. Probe more. How do they generate ideas? How do they know which ones to pick? Do you have an approach to assisting them in this process?]
     - Items related to research may be mentioned as well. How do students research? What do they do with what they learn?
   - Since the sustained investigation work doesn't grow out of assignments, how do you facilitate this process, especially as students make their first few pieces?
     - What do you see as your role, as students get started in thinking about what they intend to pursue or focus on?
   - When students go about deciding what they want to pursue in their sustained investigation work, are there common approaches or ideas that come up often? Why do you think that is?
     - Are there any that you've been excited about lately?
       - Have there been times where you've felt the need to steer a student away from a particular idea or approach? Why was that? Can you tell me about that?
   - After students have more or less made some decisions about the general direction of their sustained investigation work, what are some areas where they are likely to need your help and guidance over the next several weeks or months? Can you give me a recent example? What did it look like?

- Do students ever completely change their mind as they work (about their topic or approach)? Can you tell me more about how this work changes or evolves?
- What are the challenges in guiding students through this process? How have you addressed those challenges?

4. Artmaking as investigation
   - "Sustained investigation" is a new title – for many years, this section of the portfolio was called the *concentration*
     - What do you think is the difference between a body of work that is a visual investigation and one that is not? (Or are they all investigations)?
     - Can you give me an example of a student concentration that you feel was very successful as an investigation? What made it so?
     - Is there anything that you do with students or say to students during this process to help them think of their work in these terms?

5. Sustained investigation as an assessment
   - If you were guiding students in the creation of a body of twelve works that was not going to be scored for college credit – if students were just creating a body of work as a part of an advanced course with you:
     - Would you facilitate this process differently? How so?
     - Do you think student work would be different? How so?

6. Successes/challenges in sustained investigation
   - Can you think of a recent example of a sustained investigation where the student him or herself was very excited about their work? What did that look like? What were they doing? Why do you think they were so interested?
   - Can you give me an example of one that didn't go as well as you might have hoped? What made it less successful?
   - If you could change anything about the sustained investigation requirements, what would it be? What makes you say that?

APPENDIX H

Interview Protocol: Reader

1. Opening questions:
   - Can you describe your work with the APSA program?
   - Are you currently an art educator as well? Where/what do you teach?

2. Describing the sustained investigation:
   - In this research, I've been speaking with teachers, and students about the sustained investigation segment of the portfolio, and how they communicate about this process to one another. I'm wondering if you could describe the requirements of the sustained investigation, from a reader's perspective.
   - If you had to explain to someone who was completely unfamiliar with the AP portfolio WHY the sustained investigation section is there, what would you tell them?
     - What function do you think it serves?
     - In your impression, is there anything that this section asks students to do that the other sections don't?
     - In your best-case dream classroom, (if you had total control), how would teachers describe what the sustained investigation is to their students? What does it look like to teach this section well?
     - Do you think there are any misconceptions in the AP community about what the sustained investigation is or how it's meant to work? What are those? Why do you think that is?

3. Qualities of a successful concentration
   - Can you tell me about a student's sustained investigation that you've felt was particularly successful? What did the student do? And why was that especially interesting?
     - What about an unsuccessful one? [then extenders]
   - What are the challenges of evaluating the sustained investigation?