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THE PHENOMENON OF THE SINGLETON EDUCATOR: EXPLORING ART TEACHERS EXPERIENCES AS SINGLETON TEACHERS IN RURAL COMMUNITIES

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation documents the storied experiences of seven singleton art educators teaching in small rural school districts in the Central New York region. Participants shared their stories of working as lone art content teachers and the rewards and challenges of being a singleton educator. This phenomenological research study identifies the characteristics of the singleton phenomenon as experienced by those who live and work in this environment. Enlisting a narrative research approach of shared meaning making and phenomenological design, participants described their stories of singleton-ness through a three-interview process of data collection and group panel discussion. Participants identified several characteristics of the singleton phenomenon as well as skills they valued as necessary for successfully navigating a singleton teaching environment. Themes that emerged from participants' stories include what to do when *you don't know what you don't know*, the dual role of autonomy (freedom and responsibility), and the challenges of being a self-reliant singleton. Participants identified that although they have developed skills and strategies that have helped them be more successful in their singleton teaching environment, they still want and need professional development opportunities that engage them in content knowledge learning and connect them to other professionals in their field. Singleton educators are common in small and rural districts. Additionally, with decreased enrollment in rural school districts and subsequent financial challenges, the number of singleton content educators across disciplines will likely increase. This study identified characteristics and skills that should be considered when planning professional development for singleton educators and provides recommendations for planning initiatives to serve the needs of singleton educators across disciplines.

THE PHENOMENON OF THE SINGLETON EDUCATOR: EXPLORING ART TEACHERS
EXPERIENCES AS SINGLETON TEACHERS IN RURAL COMMUNITIES

by

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Dissertation

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For Megan

You are always my champion.

And Kiera

May you know no limits.

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This dissertation is rooted in experience. Growing up rural and the many wonderful experiences that come with a loving family and farm community living. It is rooted in my experiences as an arts minded student in a small district that struggled to offer arts programming. And it is rooted in the many people along the way that recognized my talents and supported my journey and helped me find my way.

First, I thank God for the many blessing in my life. I thank my parents for always encouraging my creativity, even when I was making messes. I am grateful for my mom who drove me to 4H and music lessons and my dad for always drawing my attention to the natural world. I owe my love of nature and skills of observation to him and my love for music to my mom.

I thank my many teachers and mentors over the years who have guided me along my path. I am especially grateful to Dr. Rolling who has been a mentor and advisor for these many years as I have woven my doctoral studies into the business of my life and teaching career. I also thank my dissertation committee, Dr. Rolling, Dr. Shedd, Dr. Tillotson, and Dr. Mauldin for their advice and support throughout this process. I truly enjoyed our conversations and appreciate your interest in my research and your time dedicated to helping reach my goals.

Finally, wholeheartedly, I thank my family and friends for their support. I thank my husband who is always my best friend and steadfast supporter. I thank my children, Megan and Daniel, who are my greatest accomplishments and my source of inspiration. I love you all.

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Chapter 1: Rural Education and the Singleton

The phenomenon of the singleton educator has been a matter of concern from the early time of rural school reform (Biddle & Azano, 2016), yet, little is known about this phenomenon and how it affects rural art teachers' experiences as educators (Hagin, 2020; Hansen, 2015; Loucks-Horsley, Stiles, Mundry, Love, & Hewson, 2010; Loughran, Berry, & Mulhall, 2012; Shulman, 1986). The history of rural education tells us that rich, contextual information about the communities in which students live and their values, traditions, and experiences are important to knowing how these students learn. Such information in turn can inform how teachers teach and how students experience learning. Knowledge about teachers' teaching experiences, the context in which they teach and their perceptions of experience, can better inform initiatives to serve teachers' personal and professional needs.

Darling-Hammond states that, "among all school resources, good teachers are the most important determinant of student achievement" (2003, p. 2). Therefore, understanding the context in which teachers teach, and exploring the challenges and resources they encounter in their teaching environments, is vital to supporting good quality teaching and student learning. Rural school communities are underrepresented in education research (Barley & Brighham, 2008; Coladarci, 2007; Lavalley, Center for Public Education, 2018; Moffa & McHenry-Sorber, 2018; Pendall, Goodman, Zhu, & Gold, 2016; Reid, Green, Cooper, Hastings, Lock, & White, 2010; Tice, Billings & Banks, 1993; Wilson, Floden, & Ferrini-Mundy, 2001). Singleton educators are common in rural school communities (LaGarry & Richard, 2018). A singleton is an educator who is the lone content specialist in his/her school or district (Ferriter, Graham, & Wight, 2013; Hansen, 2015; Leane & Yost, 2020; Venables, 2011). Singleton educators do not have content peers within their school communities to share ideas or participate in professional

development with or seek advice or support from to enhance their teaching and learning. Little is known about the phenomenon of the singleton educator (Hagin 2020; Hansen, 2015; Loucks-Horsley et al., 2010; Loughran et al., 2012; Shulman, 1986), although *singleton-ness* has been linked to feelings of professional and personal isolation (Battersby & Verdi, 2015; Berwager, 2013; Brook 2011; Cohen-Evron, 2002; Ferriter et al. 2013; Gates, 2010; Hanes & Schiller, 1994; Hansen, 2015; Inwood 2001; Richmond & Manokore, 2011). Additionally, art educators are often singleton educators (Bain, Newton, Kuster, & Milbrandt, 2010; Battersby & Verdi, 2015; Berwager, 2013; Cohen-Evron, 2002; Freedman, 2007; Gates, 2010; Hanawalt, 2105, 2016; Hanes & Schiller, 1994; Hochtritt et al., 2014; Milbrandt, 2006; Nahal, 2010; Paris, 2013; Scheib, 2006) serving as content specialist across grade levels and teaching a variety of medium within the purview of visual arts.

Brig Leane and Jon Yost (2022), in their book entitled *Singletons in a PLC at work: Navigating on-ramps to meaningful collaboration*, identify that "All schools have singletons, and some schools have many singletons or are made up solely of singletons" (p. 3). The authors go on to describe the challenges leaders face when seeking to design Professional Development Communities (PLC) that support "meaningful collaboration" for singleton educators. Leane and Yost (2022), expanding upon a DuFour et al. (2016) definition, defines meaningful collaboration as "a significant, valuable, worthwhile, and systematic process in which educators work together, interdependently, to analyze and impact their professional practices to improve individual and collective results" (p. 10). The challenge becomes how to support singletons in identifying and defining their needs to inform the facilitation of networks of meaningful collaboration within and across communities.

More needs to be known about the phenomenon of the singleton educator to document the characteristics of this phenomenon and better understand the needs and experiences of educators who work as singletons. In the following introduction I will describe my experience as a singleton art and enrichment educator, explain how I came to be interested in this topic and the needs of rural singleton educators, and outline the significance, methodology, and rationale for this study.

Personal Context

I grew up in a small rural community much like the one I live in and teach in now. The community was comprised of farm families and other mostly lower and middle-class families that chose rural living and commuted to the neighboring sub-urban and urban communities for work. I was the fifth child in my farm family. My parents both grew up on family farms and purchased a dairy farm near my mother's homestead in Central New York. My school was small, graduating less than 100 students each year. I was proud of my rural roots and embraced my identity as a farm girl. Farm living was respected in our tight knit community and many times I witnessed neighbor helping neighbor in times of need and celebration.

My school experience was typical, I imagine, to most children. I liked to learn, and my favorite subjects were art, music, and science. As I progressed in years, I started to feel the limitations of a small school and community. The art and music learning I longed for were missing from my experience. Opportunities for these subjects were limited by the size of the school budget, and more importantly the culture of the community. I noticed that art and music were not particularly valued and often cut from school programming, even when we had already advanced partway through the school year. From one year to the next, it was uncertain what arts classes would be offered and this inconsistency left gaps in my experience that I have worked a

lifetime as a learner and teacher to overcome. I admired peers and programs in neighboring communities where the arts were valued, and the school prioritized this learning for their students. I thirsted for these experiences and sought out arts learning outside of school wherever and whenever I could. I was lucky to have parents who recognized this passion in me and were willing to support my "extra-curricular" learning as best they could on a farm family budget.

Growing up I did not perceive my family as being poor and not until I was filling out my college applications did I realize that according to the national statistics, we were. Yet in many ways—ways that I was brought up to believe mattered most—we were rich. Country living teaches you to be self-sufficient, resourceful, and resilient. It teaches you to respect and admire nature and natural forces. These forces teach you to be adaptable and problem-solve your way through the challenges you encounter. Many times, in my youth, I observed these skills in my father as he worked on the farm. He was my hero. He could fix anything, and I was his number one assistant. I would watch as he rebuilt machinery, mended the barn, and nursed sick livestock back to health. I learned that these skills were interconnected and that the process was the key to the product.

These collective experiences form my philosophy of learning and my method(s) for teaching and now my research. I am an advocate for experiential learning; learning defined as the "process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience" (Kolb, 1984). I believe, as defined by Bruner, Dewey, Piaget, Vygotsky and Kolb, that knowledge is constructed through experience and providing these experiences is the role of education. I believe that information, or book learning, without context lacks the "staying power" of contextual experience and that an interdisciplinary approach to teaching adds the context and

purpose that many children today are struggling to identify in their school experience and learning.

Research shows that schools in rural communities are particularly vulnerable because of geographic isolation, limited tax base, inequitable measures of need and state/national funding, and outside attacks on community structure and culture (Azano, Callahan, Brodersen, & Caughey, 2017; Azano & Steward, 2016; Education Commission, 2017; Center for Public Education, 2018; Garcia, Jones, & Isaacson, 2015; New York State Association of School Business Officials, 2017; Wiezorek & Manard, 2018; Walker, 2017). Rural districts struggle to maintain administrative and teaching staff and the ability to support diverse programming in light of low or decreasing enrollment. They lack structural resources such as curriculum directors and human resource personnel putting the burden of these roles onto the already over-burdened administrators and teachers (Wiezorek & Manard, 2018). I witnessed these challenges in my youth as an arts minded learner in a rural community and experienced them again over the course of my fifteen years as an arts educator in a rural school district.

Problem Statement

There is a gap in research focused specifically on the phenomenon of the singleton educator (Hagin 2020; Hansen, 2015; Loucks-Horsley et al., 2010; Loughran et al., 2012; Shulman, 1986). A singleton is a lone teacher who is solely responsible for teaching a specialty subject, such as art, technology, and physics, or any teacher singly responsible for teaching a subject in a building or district (Ferriter et al., 2013; Hansen, 2015; Venables, 2011). A better understanding of the context in which singletons work and how they describe their teaching experiences and needs is necessary to inform initiatives for effective teacher professional development. Singleton content specialists are common in small and/or rural districts (Battersby

& Verdi, 2015; Berwager, 2013; Cohen-Evron, 2002; Ferriter et al. 2013; Gates, 2010; Hanes & Schiller, 1994; Hansen, 2015; Richmond & Manokore, 2011; Brook 2011; Inwood, 2001). The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) reported that 46.5 percent of all United States school districts in 2019-20 had an enrollment of less than 1000 students and 70.7 percent of U.S. districts enrolled less than 2500 students (NCES, Table 203.72). In New York State specifically, 90 percent of districts reported enrollments of less than 1000 students in 2019-20 (NCES, Table 216.43).

Additionally, NCES (2019) reported that 28 percent of all U.S. school districts are classified as rural and 13.2 percent as town, indicating that 41.2 percent of all districts are located outside of urban and sub-urban population centers. Furthermore, in 2019, 19.5 percent of all U.S. students attended a rural school district with 30.3 percent of students attending schools located in rural communities and town (NCES, Table 214.40). NCES (Table 209.22) reported the total percentage of teachers employed in rural districts in 2018 was 20.5 percent and towns 11.6 percent with sub-urban and urban communities at 38.7 percent and 29.1 percent respectively. These statistics highlight the distribution of students and educators across communities according to school size and classification (rural, town, sub-urban, urban). It is evident that there is a high percentage of schools that regularly rely upon singleton educators.

In recent years, with the introduction of new learning standards for the arts in New York State (2017, New York State P-12 Learning Standards for the Arts), attention has shifted to providing professional development to help arts educators interpret and apply these standards in their classroom. Locally, the Board of Cooperative Educational Services (BOCES) has offered Arts Leadership Network training to districts, facilitating a community of arts educators to read, interpret, and align their existing arts curriculum to the new standards. I have attended the Arts

Leadership Network meetings as a representative from my district since they began in 2018. In the beginning, many districts sent their teams of arts educators, curriculum specialists, and even administrators to these meetings to learn how to "unpack" the standards and develop mission and vision statements for their district arts programs. Arts teachers representing small districts had to navigate these tasks as singletons. As district teams worked together, singletons grouped together and tackled the tasks as best they could from different districts with different programs and contexts. For me, this was an eye-opening experience. On the one hand, it was great to be communicating with other educators who shared my discipline. We talked through frustrations, shared lesson ideas, and worked together on mission and vision statements for our districts. On the other hand, when the meetings were over and we each went back to our districts, we were once again left to carry on this work alone, without the support and collaboration of the group. This experience opened my eyes to the potential that these encounters had to offer. What if there were a way to create communities of singletons? What if we didn't have to work in isolation? How can we devise a system to better support one another?

In the second year of the workshops, a small group of us got together and created an action plan to begin hosting art educator workshops to focus on best practices, lesson exemplars and standards work. We were going to form our own support network. The first workshop was held at a rural district in the region with an open invitation to area art educators seeking an opportunity to collaborate in art focused professional development. Several art teachers attended from a variety of districts. The morning session focused on lesson sharing and arts advocacy and the afternoon session focused on hands-on exploration of art techniques and tools. The program was well received, and plans were in place to hold another workshop the following school year.

Unfortunately, the COVID pandemic forced schools into distance learning and prevented in person gatherings of this nature and the momentum for this initiative was disrupted.

To continue the work of the Arts Leadership Network and despite the pandemic, Arts in Education Coordinator for the Center for Instruction, Technology & Innovation (CITI), a division of BOCES (Boards of Cooperative Educational Services) William Jones, solicited volunteers to participate on committees to plan programming to continue the network initiatives. I served on each of the committees: Arts Advocacy, Best Practices, and Essential Standards. Due to the constraints of the pandemic and the pressures arts teachers were facing, teaching remotely and then with distancing restrictions, masking, and constraints on materials use, the Advocacy and Best Practices committees suspended meetings. The Essential Standards committee continued meeting and created a virtual platform to hold meetings and plan virtual workshops for teachers. The committee members facilitated virtual meetings with breakout sessions to concentrate on unpacking standards and provide support for teachers' lesson planning and curriculum mapping. The group focused on the N.Y.S. Arts Standard, Connecting. The first meetings were modestly attended, and this was attributed to the extraordinary demands on teachers' time due to the pandemic. Those who did attend were often singletons seeking professional development support for their lesson planning and standards work.

In an interview with coordinator William Jones, he shared his experience in developing the Arts Leadership programming. He described his vision for bringing together arts teachers and leaders from across the region to form an Arts Leadership Network. Having observed similar leadership networks in other disciplines such as ELA, Science, and Math, he questioned why such a community did not exist for arts educators. As a regional arts coordinator, Will interacts with arts educators from numerous districts across the region. Until recently, arts educators, often

functioning as singletons in their discipline, were not included in a BOCES supported leadership network. He and his colleague, Theodore Love, then Director of Instruction at a local district, were responsible for the launched of the Arts Leadership Network in October 2018, providing for the first time a community where arts educators could interact, collaborate, and learn from one another.

Will also described the challenges faced by singleton educators in the districts he serves. They often pass up professional development opportunities because of the time these meetings take away from their already overextended schedules. He described these teachers as being trapped in their situation, although a network of arts colleagues could help them with the challenges of their teaching demands, they do not feel as though they can afford the time away from their classrooms. This "self-reliant" (Lortie, 1975) phenomenon isolates these educators and inadvertently alienates them from their content peers. Will also described teachers that when they compared their programs to those of larger districts and the teams of teachers they bring to professional development meeting, expressed feelings of being overwhelmed. To combat such feelings, Will often tries to divide school groups so that all participants can learn from others, thus discouraging larger district groups' tendency to stick together. Will stressed the importance of regular meetings and "sustaining the conversation." He also reflected that it takes time for learning networks to develop and for members to feel as part of a community.

Ultimately, he described his goal to be "to develop teacher leaders". Arts teacher leaders who will eventually take over the "administration" of the network. His rationale has two tenants, leadership must come from within, and sustainable programs cannot rely upon one leader. In creating a team or teams of arts teacher leaders the Arts Leadership Network will not become vulnerable to the disruptions that are often associated with district leadership change. These

kinds of disruptions are all too familiar in education, especially in small or underfunded districts. As administrations come and go so do the programs they control. Having an effective and sustainable Arts Leadership Network can provide consistency and support for arts educators in times of structural change. Having a district supported professional arts network is something many local arts educators have not had in the past and is long overdue. It is essential for program developers to consider the needs of singleton educators when designing professional development opportunities for all educators.

Statement of Purpose

The purpose of this study is to gather information regarding the characteristics of the phenomenon of the singleton as experienced by art educators working in rural communities. This information will inform professional development initiatives better designed serve the needs of singleton art educators and singleton educators across disciplines.

Research Questions

This inquiry will seek to answer the following questions:

- What are the characteristics of the phenomenon of the rural singleton art educator's experience?

- How do rural singleton art teachers describe their experiences as lone content specialist in their buildings or districts?

- What meaning do rural singleton art teachers make from their singleton teaching experiences?

- What shared meanings do a group of rural singleton art teachers make from their collective experience as lone content specialist in their school or district?

- How can this shared meaning inform initiatives to provide professional development for singleton arts educators?

Definitions of Key Terms

Rural District - districts located in communities defined as rural (Census Classification Codes) by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), districts with total student enrollment of less than 1000 students pre-kindergarten thru twelfth grade, districts with a total population of residents of less than 7500 people, and districts with Rural Schools Association membership or affiliation.

Singleton - A singleton is commonly a lone teacher who is solely responsible for teaching a specialty subject, such as art, technology, and physics, or any teacher singly responsible for teaching a subject in a building or district (Ferriter et al., 2013; Hansen, 2015; Venables, 2011).

Singleton-ness – The state of being a singleton.

Assumptions

This study assumes that an understanding of the characteristics of the singleton phenomenon will better inform the development of comprehensive professional development programming that meets the personal and professional needs of singleton educators. Additionally, this inquiry assumes that singleton educators share common characteristics in relationship to their experiences as singletons and that through a process of reflection and shared meaning making, they will construct meaning from these experiences and generate knowledge that advances the understanding of the singleton phenomenon.

Overview of Methodology

A psychological constructivist paradigm (Bogdan & Bilken, 1998; Mertens, 2005) guides the methodology and methods of this study. Data collection will be conducted following a

phenomenological methodology, enlisting open-ended interview style, data collection methods to collect participants' experiences as singleton educators. A psychological constructivist paradigm provides a theoretical framework that recognizes that individuals, singleton rural arts educators, have their own unique stories to tell and through the sharing of these stories, a more nuanced understanding of the singleton phenomenon can be developed. An inductive process of gathering stories of participant perspectives (Erickson, 1986) of teaching as singletons in rural communities recognizes the value of each participant's individual contextual experience. These individual experiences will inform an understanding of the singleton experience across contexts. Additionally, by bringing singletons together to co-construct meaning from their experiences (Phillips, 2000) in a panel discussion, they can "come to an agreement about the nature and warrant of a description of a phenomenon or its relationship to others" (Richardson, 2003, p. 3). This shared meaning making (Seidman, 2013) then becomes formal knowledge of a phenomenon as experienced by the group.

The questions explored in this study seek to collect rich, thick descriptive accounts and analysis of singleton's contextual experiences as rural arts singleton educators. A study of this nature requires a qualitative research design (Creswell, 2014; Meriam & Tisdell, 2016; Patton, 2015). Historically, research in rural education has failed to value context when assessing the assets and needs of rural communities and their teachers (Biddle & Azano, 2016). This study recognizes that not all rural communities and school contexts are the same and that singleton educators each have their own unique experience as a singleton educator. Additionally, in order to design professional learning communities for rural singleton arts educators, developers need to understand more about the phenomenon of the singleton experience and how these educators make meaning of these experiences as individuals (Patton, 2015) and as a group (Phillips, 2000).

This philosophical perspective acknowledges that initiatives to serve communities of individuals need to begin with the voices of those being served.

Data collection methods for this study will include a three-interview series per participant, a panel discussion, field notes, artifacts, and background/demographic questionnaire. Participants will be solicited from rural districts included in the OCM BOCES (Onondaga Cortland Madison Board of Cooperative Educational Serves) central region. The following criteria were used in defining the rural status of school districts canvased for this study: districts located in communities defined as rural (Rural-Distant, Rural-Fringe, Census Classification Codes) by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), districts with total student enrollment of less than 1000 students pre-kindergarten thru twelfth grade, districts with a total population of residents of less than 7500 people, and districts with Rural Schools Association membership or affiliation.

Data collection and analysis for this study enlists an ongoing and inductive process. An interpretive analysis of the storied accounts of participants' singleton experiences will be coded and analyzed to reveal contextual inferences and meanings that underlie the singleton phenomenon (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Data will be analyzed through an interpretive, constructivist lens. "Interpretivism is an approach to social science that asserts that understanding the beliefs, motivations, and reasoning of individuals in a social situation is essential to decoding the meaning of the data that can be collected around a phenomenon" (Nickerson, 2022, p.1). As patterns or themes emerge in the data these themes will be recorded, coded, and analyzed to identify characteristics of *singleton-ness.* As described earlier, participants will participate in a panel discussion of their experiences and data collected, providing a group opportunity to analyze their experiences and co-construct meaning across

contexts. A more detailed description of data collection methods and analysis is provided in the methodology chapter.

Rationale and Significance

There is a long history of challenges in providing effective supports for teachers working in rural communities and rural education in general (Barley & Brighham, 2008; Billings, & Banks, 1993; Coladarci, 2007; Lavalley, Center for Public Education, 2018; Johnson, Mitchel, & Rotherham 2014; McHenry-Sorber & Moffa; Pendall, Goodman, Zhu, & Gold, 2016; Reid et al. 2010; Wilson, Floden, & Ferrini-Mundy, 2001). As illustrated in the previous personal account, professional isolation is common among singleton content teachers in rural and small districts (Battersby & Verdi, 2015; Berwager, 2013; Cohen-Evron, 2002; Ferriter et al. 2013; Gates, 2010; Hanes & Schiller, 1994; Hansen, 2015; Richmond & Manokore, 2011; Brook 2011; Inwood, 2001). Art(s) educators are often isolated singletons in their buildings or districts (Bain, Newton, Kuster, & Milbrandt, 2010; Battersby & Verdi, 2015; Berwager, 2013; Cohen-Evron, 2002; Freedman, 2007; Gates, 2010; Hanawalt, 2105, 2016; Hanes & Schiller, 1994; Hochtritt, Thulson, Delaney, Dornbush, & Shay, 2014; Milbrandt, 2006; Nahal, 2010; Paris, 2013; Scheib, 2006).

Current scholarship promotes teacher collaboration in the form of professional development communities to improve teacher quality and student outcomes (Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2005; Day, Stobart, Sammons, Kington, & Gu, 2007; Garet, Porter, Desimone, Birman & Yoon, 2001; Leana, 2011; Loucks-Horsley et al., 2010; Loughran et al., 2012; Malhoit 2005; Morrissey, 2000; Nias, Southworth, & Yeomans, 1989; Rosenholtz, 1989; Schleifer, Rinehart, & Yanisch, 2017; Shulman, 1986; Talbert & McLaughlin, 1994; and Vescio, Ross, & Adams, 2008). Additionally, the federal Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA, USDOE, 2015) and

State Law 100.2(dd) Professional Development Plans Terms (NYSED, 2018) mandate access to and support for teacher professional development for all teachers. However, current models of teacher professional development in the form of professional development communities are not adequately designed to accommodate singleton educators and often only consider the needs of singletons as an afterthought (Hansin, 2015).

Professional development initiatives that do not include the input of participants in planning and decision making often fail when they are mandated from the top-down (Hargreaves & Dawe, 1990; Ingersoll & Alsalam, 1997; Pearson & Moomaw, 2005; Tye & Tye, 1984). Such initiative can be inconsistent and haphazard (Pomson, 2005) and perceived by participants as contrived congeniality (Hargreaves, 1994). When considering this problem from a systems' perspective, it is worth noting that systems function best when the stakeholders share common values and goals. These goals need to be clearly stated and revisited often to ensure that all elements in the system have a common understanding. Once this is established, the hierarchy of the system needs to work toward supporting the elements' ability to meet the system's goals. Fullan puts it this way, "…rigid boundaries at all levels should give way to partnerships (horizontally and vertically) which pursue the principles and assumptions of taking collective responsibility for achieving new levels of performance" (2004, p. 18). Meadows tells us to, "Aid and encourage the forces and structures that help the system run itself". She also cautions interveners to "pay attention to what is already there" before charging in to "make things better" (2009, p.178). Fullan (2005) on system reform states, "If individuals are proactive, they stimulate others and make it more likely that the system will begin to change, resulting in new breakthroughs" (p.9).

Exploring the characteristics of the phenomenon of the singleton educator can inform professional development initiatives across disciplines. The purpose of this study is to gather information regarding the characteristics of the phenomenon of the singleton as experiences by art educators working in rural communities. Since singletons are often found in rural and small districts (Battersby & Verdi, 2015; Berwager, 2013; Cohen-Evron, 2002; Ferriter et al. 2013; Gates, 2010; Hanes & Schiller, 1994; Hansen, 2015; Richmond & Manokore, 2011; Brook, 2011; Inwood, 2001) it is appropriate to locate this study in communities that often experience this phenomenon. There is a small collection of studies focusing on professional development and singleton educators in other disciplines such as secondary science (Hagin, 2020), family and consumer sciences (Dodor, Sira, & Hausafus, 2010), and music (Sindberg & Lipscomb, 2005, Sindberg, 2011, 2014). A study of the characteristics of the phenomenon of the singleton art educator in a rural context will add to the developing body of knowledge in this area and provide depth and breadth to our understanding of the needs of these educators and the nature of this phenomenon. Documenting singleton art teachers' accounts of working as singletons in rural community districts will elicit rich contextual information (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Creswell 2014) about this phenomenon. Additionally, bringing singleton rural arts educators together in the co-construction of shared meaning (Richardson, 2003) of these experiences will add to the development of knowledge of this phenomenon across communities and experience adding to the broader field of research. Locally, this information will inform the development of professional development initiatives to serve arts educators in this area according to their identified professional development needs and characteristics.

Role of the Researcher and Positionality

My role as researcher in this study is to facilitate the capturing of storied accounts of participants' experiences as singleton educators in rural communities. Although I also serve as a singleton educator in a rural district, my experience may be quite different from those of the participants. It is their stories I must tell. My experience as a rural student and now rural art teacher fuels my passion for this topic. I will encourage my participants to tell their stories and emphasize the value of their experiences in this process of gathering data on the singleton phenomenon. As described earlier in this chapter, context is important to meaning making and their experiences are important to an understanding of how to improve resources for singleton arts educators. A phenomenological perspective is interpretive and acknowledges that the researcher cannot assume they know what things mean to their participants (Douglas, 1976). My role as researcher will require that I not impose my perspective on the experiences of my participants but rather elicit explanations and details that accurately document their experiences and the meaning they make from these experiences. I will ensure credibility of the data and analysis by conducting ongoing member checks and providing an open channel of communication between my participants and myself throughout the study. Enlisting a psychological constructivist paradigm (Bogdan & Bilken, 1998; Mertens, 2005) to guide this study allows for an inductive process of data collection and analysis that is reflexive to the nuances of meaning making that occurs when individuals reflect upon their experience(s) over time. Choosing a three-interview series (Seidman, 2013; Shuman, 1986) of data collection allows the participants to review their transcripts and add to or refine their stories and my analysis. A more detailed description of data collection and analysis methods is provided in the methodology chapter.

Summary

An understanding of the characteristics of the phenomenon of the singleton educator is essential to the ability to design effective professional development communities that serve the needs of these lone educators. Current trends in education reform initiatives recommend professional learning communities to improve teacher quality and student learning. Additionally, the rollout of new state learning standards and teacher accountability measures have increased pressure on districts and educators to participate in professional development and revisit and revise curriculum goals and standards in the arts.

Local agencies such as OCMBOCES have made efforts to create professional learning communities such as the Arts Leadership Network to facilitate teacher professional development and create learning communities for educators. The needs of singleton educators, often found in small or rural communities, continue to be a challenge when designing these PD programming. William Jones describes the challenges he faces as a professional development coordinator and acknowledges that more needs to be known about these educators' experiences and needs and that arts education leaders need to be encouraged to promote consistency and advocacy for their programs. My experience reflects the frustration singleton educators have with professional development that does not recognize the unique circumstances of the singleton educator. It is the intent of this study to document the stories of rural singleton educators to elicit knowledge about the characteristics of the singleton phenomenon. This knowledge will serve to inform professional development initiative that better serve the needs of this unique population of educators.

Chapter Overview

In the following chapters, I provide a review of the literature as well as an outline of the methods and methodology used to conduct this study. The Literature Review in Chapter 2 is

organized into the following sections: Rural Education Research; Singleton Educator – Review of Studies; Understanding the Phenomenon of the Singleton Educator; Singletons, School Reform Efforts, and Professional Development; Conceptual Framework; and Summary. This chapter begins with a review of the history of rural education reform initiatives and the "rural school problem". It continues with a review of existing studies that identify *singleton-ness* as a characteristic the participants of the study. Followed by an account of the literature describing the context of the phenomenon of the singleton educator. Then, reviews trends in school reform and recent professional development initiatives. Finally, the review explores theories in research and outlines the research supporting the conceptual framework for this study followed by a brief chapter summary.

The description of Methodology in Chapter 3 provides the rationale and procedures for this study. In this chapter, I describe the theoretical framework and methods used for gathering data on the storied accounts of singleton arts educators in rural districts. Additionally, I provide a detailed description of the rural context of this study and parameters for participant selection. Data collection methods and procedures for analysis are also provided. The chapter includes descriptions of my ethical considerations, procedures to ensuring the trustworthiness and protection of data and participant privacy considerations. The chapter concludes with a description of potential limitations and delimitations followed by a summary.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

The first section of this literature review will summarize the history of rural education reform and the changing views of rurality. Then, it will include a discussion of the difficulty in defining rural in the context of rural education research. The second section will explore the existing literature on the phenomenon of the singleton educator and studies that report empirical evidence of singleton teacher isolation. Section 3 will include an overview of current trends in teacher professional development (PD) and the challenges of providing quality PD for singleton educators. The fourth section will describe the conceptual framework for this study. The final section will provide a summary of the literature reviewed and how it relates to this study's objectives.

Rural Education Research

The phenomenon of the singleton educator is not unique to the rural school setting but is prevalent in small community schools and districts often found in rural areas (Hansen, 2015; Richmond & Manokore, 2011). This distinction makes the exploration of the phenomenon of the singleton arts educator in the context of the rural setting relevant for study and warrants a review of the existing literature on rural education reform efforts. Massey and Crosby (1983) state that "Rural residents are far more likely to suffer in silence than to demand attention from the agencies and institutions ostensibly designed to serve them" (p. 266). It is imperative that rural community needs are included in the discourse of education reform and policymaking. The Rural School and Community Trust's 50-state report on rural education, ninth edition, entitled "Why Rural Matters 2018-19: The Time is Now", reports that more than 9.3 million, or one in five

students in the United States attend a rural school (Showalter, Hartman, Johnson, & Klein, 2019). In thirteen U.S. states, one in three students are enrolled in rural districts (Johnson, Showalter, Klein, & Lester 2014; NCES, 2016). Despite these significant numbers, research in the field of rural education is under-represented in education research (Barley & Brighham, 2008; Billings, & Banks, 1993; Lavalley, Center for Public Education, 2018; Tice, Wilson, Floden, & Ferrini-Mundy, 2001) and policy decisions (Johnson, Mitchel, & Rotherham 2014; Pendall, Goodman, Zhu, & Gold, 2016).

Dating back to the U.S. Commission on Country Life 1909 report on the status of rural life, education reformers have problematized the condition of rural education. The following section will chronicle the history of rural education reform and provide a review of scholarly literature addressing the challenges and necessity of rural education research. Additionally, this section will explore the difficulty in defining "rural" as a construct in a diverse and changing world and provide recommendations for addressing this challenge when conducting rural education research. Finally, this review will conclude with a discussion of the literature challenging the operationalization of rurality as a theoretical construct for research and discuss how this construct can be clearly defined for a comprehensive study of the phenomenon of the singleton art educator in a rural school system.

Method for Synthesis of the Literature on Rural Education

To collect and analyze the literature on rural education research I used Syracuse University's library databases, Google and Google Scholar, and resources provided by organizations such as the Rural Schools Association of New York, the National Rural Schools Association, and the National School Boards Association Center for Public Education. Additionally, I drew from books and articles collected from my previous research. I applied the

following key terms to this section of my literature review "rural," "rural education," "rural and education," and "rural education and research". This search focused on academic books and articles and peer reviewed research studies limited to the rural education system in the United States revealing 216 results. Additionally, I applied the terms "rural education and art," "rural art education," and "rural art teacher" to explore the availability of literature on art education in the context of a rural environment which yielded limited results. The search, however, revealed a recent Working Paper authored by Donovan & Brown (2017) entitled "Leveraging Change: Increasing Access to Art Education in Rural Areas" in which the authors identify the limited literature on arts education in rural areas. "While increased attention on the needs of rural areas is starting to develop with such groups as The Art of the Rural and Americans for the Arts, our research found there is still a paucity of literature on arts education in rural areas" (Donovan & Brown, 2017, p. 8). Additional search criteria for literature in the areas of teacher isolation and singletons, and teacher professional development and professional learning communities will be defined at the beginning of each of these topic sections forthcoming in this literature review.

History of Rural Education

In 1909, President Theodore Roosevelt tasked the U.S. Commission on Country Life to prepare a report on the condition of rural life in America. One of the findings of this report identified deficiencies in rural schools. Prominent education reformer of the time, Ellwood Cubberley (1912), coined the condition of rural schools as the "rural school problem". This deficit perspective of rural places and people was common among progressive education reformers and described as "the gravest of American problems" (Brooks, 1926, p 155). Rurality in that time was considered outdated in comparison to the emerging urban and cosmopolitan America of the 20th century (DeYoung, 1987). Biddle and Azano (2016) argued that this urban

focused construction of rurality as a "problem" is still prevalent in the field of education research today. Farmer (1997) described, "…rural being defined as what is left over after urban has been defined" (p. 624). To understand the evolution of the construct of the "rural school problem" over time in education research, Biddle and Azano (2016) conducted a case study of a century of literature focused on rural teacher training, recruitment, and retention. The authors reviewed articles from two rural-specific journals using symbolic interactionism to examine how language creates discourse and interpretations of rurality (Blumer, 1996). Additionally, the authors used transactional theory to understand the mutually shaping experience of meaning making between the reader and the text (Rosenblatt, 1978, 1938/1983, 2005); recognizing that meaning making of text is subjective to the reader's prior experience.

By looking to the past, we are better positioned to understand the present and plan for the future. The findings from Biddle and Azano's (2016) research revealed a pattern of reform and policy making worth mentioning here. After Roosevelt's 1909 Country Life Commission's report on rural America, there was a growing interest in modernization and education reform in rural communities (DeYoung, 1987). The focus of the time was on progress and new efficiencies to improve rural life (Bowers, 1971). Such efficiencies included improvements in transportation, railroads, and roads to provide access to modern technology such as telephones and electricity. Other "progress" included modernizing efficiencies with steam engines and motorized power to perform tasks once done by men and animals. Universities and normal schools organized by urban education reformers formed rural education departments to address the recruitment and retention of rural teachers. Additional proposed improvements included rural school consolidation to promote differentiated instruction and build teaching staffs and fostering community support for isolated rural teachers (Biddle & Azano, 2016). This push for modernity

and advocacy for improvements in rural education continued throughout the first half of the century leading to the 1944 Charter of Rights of the Rural Child to Education (Dawson & Hubbard, 1944). This pledge guaranteed every rural child the right to a modern education and its benefits provided by "sufficiently prepared teachers and school leaders who understand rural life" (Biddle & Azano, 2016, p. 304). In their analysis of the first part of the century, Biddle & Azano stated that reformers identified obstacles to the resolution of "the rural school problem" as the difficulty of recruitment and training of rural schoolteachers (Fishpaw, 1912) and the ability of rural communities to compete with the modernity of "town life" (Hillyer, 1916) to attract these teachers. Additional concerns were the outmigration of youth from rural communities, and inadequate finances compared to town and city schools (Shibley, 1917).

Reformers tried to resolve some of these issues by training teachers to help students "connect to the natural charm of the rural environment" (Biddle & Azano, 2016, p. 305) in effort to thwart youth outmigration and promote a new generation of farmers. Additionally, teachers were trained to help students "transcend the backwardness and parochialism assumed to be part of their communities" (Biddle & Azano, 2016, p. 305) by exposing them to urban high culture (Smart, 1920). These initiatives, perhaps well intentioned, seem to be contradictory in nature and lacking in a true understanding and appreciation of rural culture, derived from an urban-centric reformist perspective.

Writers and researchers of the1920s -1930s, used "the rural school problem" as an indicator of need for rural school reform. This deficit definition was advantageous and led to the formation of professorships and academic departments dedicated specifically to rural education reform (Biddle & Azano, 2016). This also led to the formation of the Department of Rural Education and the Journal of Rural Education (Carney, 1918, 1932; Dawson & Hubbard, 1944;

Knight, 1920; McCallister, 1938). Institutionally the following categories of rural challenges were identified and broadly addressed in the literature of the time: school buildings (infrastructure), community support, teacher training (and recruitment), and curriculum for students.

Biddle and Azano (2016) reported that overtime "the rural school problem" became more clearly defined in the literature focusing upon the appropriate conditions for "proper instruction for rural children and … the adequacy of training and instructional support for rural teachers to create those conditions" (p. 306). Other considerations were the adequacy of the school facilities and curriculum and the specialized nature of teaching in the isolation of the one-room schoolhouse. Arguments for modern consolidated schools with grade level splits also surfaced at this time (Kephart, 1919) challenging the outdated structure of the one-room schoolhouse.

Despite this attention to defining "the rural school problem" and development of institutional supports for rural teacher education, Carney (1932) reported a gap between rural and urban teacher qualifications. At the 1944 White House Conference on Rural Education, hosted by Eleanor Roosevelt, 230 of the "country's best known rural educators" (Dawson & Hubbard, 1944, p. 1) drafted the earlier mentioned Charter of Rights of the Rural Child to Education (Dawson & Hubbard, 1944). This ten-pledge document included the right of every rural child to a satisfactory modern elementary and secondary education provided by "teachers, supervisors and administrators who know rural life and who are educated to deal effectively with the problems particular to rural schools" (Dawson & Hubbard, 1944, p. 14). Here too, the condition of rural education was viewed with a deficit lens by the "country's best rural educators"; however, some recognition of the importance of the need for teachers and administrators who "know rural life" was identified as important. For a short period thereafter, the focus was on

teacher preparation that sought to understand the needs of rural communities and prepare teachers and administrators to work in these communities. Although the intent was to modernize these rural community schools, during this time some differences in urban and rural culture were identified and considered informative for rural teacher preparation.

In the post-war era of the 1950's the one-room schoolhouse gave way to rural school consolidation and administrative modernity (Stoneciper, 1947). The uniqueness of rural community context and student needs that had only recently driven teacher preparation programs succumbed to an institutional, "dictatorship" (Eliassen & Anderson, 1952) approach to education. Participation in military service (Eliassen & Anderson, 1945; Washington, 1947); low status of teaching; low salaries; low entry requirements; high turnover (Eliassen & Anderson, 1952; Lester, 1946; Washington, 1947; J. B. White, 1947); and the requirement of teachers to be certified in more than one content area (Eliassen & Anderson, 1952) were contributors to the "manpower problem" (Patton, 1957, p. 14) of this era. Despite the increase in demand for rural schoolteachers, and the nation's declaration of commitment to the welfare of rural students (Dawson & Hubbard, 1944), higher education institutions no longer provided rural specific teacher training programs (Ferrell, 1946). Robinson (1954) declared this shift in focus as a change in the distinctions between rural and urban, from one of modernity to one of size. Additionally, in the 1940's and 1950's attention to the intersection of rural inequity in teacher quality and inequity in rural teacher quality perpetuated by segregation (J. B. White, 1947) and needs of marginalized populations (Barnhardt, 1974) gained attention.

Biddle and Azano (2015) reported that the literature of the 1970s shifted back to the declaration of need for specialized teacher training in rural education and the promotion of in-service and field-based professors and training, and the formation of rural teaching centers.

Ironically, "the rural school problems" of the early 1900, difficulty in rural teacher recruitment, changing rural demographics, and the neglect of rural communities were still present in this "modern" era. Unfortunately, this need for specialized training did not spur an outpouring of institutional support for rural education research. Lagemann (2000) credited a mid-century post-positivism lens, the popularity of high-status social science fields of research, and the use of quantitative research methods to generate generalizable knowledge in the field of education with the move away from an institutional interest in rural education research and waning interest in the "rural school problem". Put simply, the research numbers were larger in more populated non-rural communities of study.

The globalization of the U.S. economy in the late 20th century led to a reorganization of life in all communities. Agriculture and other rural American industries were reorganized by the shift to a transnational supply chain (Bonnano, 2014; Heffernan, Hendrickson, & Gronski, 1999). These shifts away from a previously diverse and geographically bounded supply chain led to rising poverty (Sherman, 2014), community outmigration (Corbett, 2007; Provasnik et al., 2007) and "dependence on the cycles of boom-bust economies tied to global commodity prices (Shafft & Biddle 2015)" (as cited in Biddle and Azano, 2016, p. 311).

The late 20th century and early 21st century brought about reports and policy changes that called for institutional accountability for public education and new measures of student, teacher, and administrative performance. The 1983 release of A Nation at Risk identified the need for improvements in public education to protect American prosperity from global competitors overtaking U.S. "preeminence in commerce, industry, science, and technological innovation" (ANAR 1983, p. 9). The turn of the century brought a renewal of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (No Child Left Behind, 2001, 2002) which called for performance–based

accountability measures and the mandate of college and career readiness for all students. Garcia, Jones, and Isaacson (2015) reported that "The No Child Left Behind (2002) legislation coupled with state laws and policies supporting this effort have put increased pressure on public educators and administrators to hold them accountable for student performance in these areas (numeracy and literacy) (The Arts Education Partnership [AEP], 2004)" (p. 2). Biddle and Azano (2016) identified these accountability measures as a spark for "resurgence in interest in rural education research and attention to differentiated rural teacher preparation, recruitment, and retention tinged with a tone of advocacy" (p. 311), making this the new rural school problem. "Corbett (2007) and Schafft (2010) suggest(ed) that, between the rapid globalization of the world economy and the resulting neoliberal shift of American educational policy, the resilience of rural communities, the necessity of their very existence, has never been tested in quite the way that it is being today" (as cited in Biddle & Azano, 2016, p. 312).

In the early 1980's, there was a growing optimism reflected in the literature reviewed by Biddle and Azano (2016). Rural population growth rates were up and even exceeding those of urban centers (Oecschlager & Guenther, 1983). The anticipation of wider scholarly and political interest in rural education research (Massey & Crosby, 1983) sparked agency in rural education research. The *Journal of Research in Rural Education, The Rural Educator*, and the *Rural Special Education Quarterly* emerged at this time. Although the population boom did not last, scholarly interest in "the rural school problem" continued to attract attention particularly because the rural school problem(s) of the previous decades had not changed in this new environment of high-stakes accountability.

Research reports that rural education still battles challenges recruiting and retaining rural school teachers (Barley & Brigham, 2008; Clifford, 2013; Darling-Hammond, & Carver-

Thomas, 2016; Ellis, 2008; Fishman, 2015; Gagnon & Mattingly, 2012; Johnson, & Hartman, 2017; Kollie, 2007; LaGarry & Richard, 2018; Lamkin, 2006; Lavalley, 2018; McHenry-Sorber & Campbell, 2019; Roberts & Green, 2013; Showalter, Klein, Jimerson, 2003; Steed, Pomerleau, Muscott, & Rohde, 2013; Strange, 2011; Sue, 2013; Sutcher, Timar & Carter, 2017) and administrators (Chance & Capps, 1990; Czaja & Harman, 1997; Fishman, 2015; Grady & Bryant, 1991; Roberts & Green, 2013). Rural school teachers report instances of professional and collegial isolation (Bain, Newton, Kuster, & Milbrandt, 2010; Barley & Brigham, 2008; Battersby & Verdi, 2015; Berwager, 2013; Burton, Brown, & Johnson 2013; Cohen-Evron, 2002; Dos Santos, 2019; Gates, 2010; Hanawalt, 2015, 2016; Hanes & Schiller, 1994; LaGarry & Richard, 2018; McDonough, Gildersleeve, & Jarsky, 2010; McHenry-Sorber et al. 2019; Moffa & McHenry-Sorber, 2018; Nahal, 2010; Paris, 2013; Showalter et al., 2019; Tayler, 2018; Weiner, 2006) exacerbated by feelings of unpreparedness due to a lack of rural content education in teacher preparation programs (Barley, 2009; Campbell, 1986; Collins, 1999; Corbett, 2016; Fickel, 2005; Moffa & McHenry-Sorber 2019; Monk, 2007; White & Kline, 2012). In an assessment of 120 mid-continent teacher preparation programs, Barley (2009), found that only 17 programs offered a rural emphasis with even less offering rural teaching placements or rural-focused courses.

Low rural teaching salaries (Akiba, Chiu, Shimizu, & Liang, 2002; Barley & Brigham, 2008; Grady & Bryant, 1991; Timar & Carter, 2016; United States Department of Education *Status of Education in Rural America Report,* 2007), outside of instruction responsibilities (Berry & Gravelle, 2013; Finson & Beaver, 1990; LaChance, Benton, & Klein, 2007), and multiple content teaching assignments (Barley & Brigham, 2008; Barrow & Burchett 2000) all contribute

to the difficulty of hiring and retaining rural school educators. Biddle and Azano (2016) described the changing face of rural education at the turn of the century as follows:

> "However, the meaning of the contribution of these factors to the "rural school problem" seemed to change within the context of a renewed emphasis on fiscal factors and, in the late 1990s and early 2000s, performance-based accountability. As standardizing expectations around student performance became a cornerstone measure by which to judge teacher effectiveness, rural education researchers increasingly perceived their role as making visible the differences between rural contexts for schooling and the urban and suburban contexts for which policymakers seemed to be crafting education policy (Sher, 1978)." (p. 313)

Fiscal challenges of the early 2000's added another layer of threats to rural school communities. New York State (NYS.) Association of School Business Officials, Rural School Report, 2017, documents a long-term decline in rural school enrollment and increase in rural student poverty. This trend is not unique to N.Y.S., with Eppley (2015) and Schafft (2010) noting that these declines are symptomatic of "larger economic issues tied to population migration and globalization" (Biddle & Azano, 2016, p.313). The mounting pressures of school closures, staffing cuts, and high stakes student evaluative measures and teacher accountability effected teacher beliefs and job satisfaction (Goetz, 2015; Newton, Darling-Hammond, Haertel, & Thomas, 2010). Biddle & Azano reported, "With regard to teacher training, the concept of sensitivity to place was a way for scholars to advocate for training programs with both social and spatial sensitivity across the rural-urban continuum" (2016, p.314). Additionally, "A new practice … of naming cultural deficit models in research exposed the century-long trend of looking only at problems of rural communities, rather than at the opportunities" (Biddle &

Azano, p. 314). A move away from a deficit model of rurality and "the rural school problem" to pedagogies of place that embrace context (place) as a conceptual lens for education reform has emerged in current trends in education research. Gruenewald (2003a) states, "As a theoretical construct, sense of place can be described as a fluid "human experience of geographical contexts" (p.626). Budge (2006) defined six habits of place a) connectedness, (b) development of identity and culture, (c) interdependence with the land, (d) spirituality, (e) ideology and politics, and (f) activism and civic engagement highlighting the importance of context and community in education reform efforts and assessment of community needs and assets.

Ironically, a century of rural education reform has returned to its source, the rural school community. The push for rural modernity at turn of the 20th century neglected to identify the assets of rural communities and their people. Although modernity is an essential part of the progression of society, the urban-centric perspective of early education reformers coined rurality as "the rural school problem" seeking ways to change these communities to meet their industrial model of education. The problem of rural school reform is not the characteristics of rurality but the institutions' inability to identify and flex to meet the needs of the students and families in these diverse communities. Biddle and Azano questioned their own meaning making from the literature review acknowledging that using teacher training, recruitment, and retention as the subject of their discourse may have unintentionally position rural as the cause of the problem. They suggest that perhaps this deficit perspective should be repositioned through the discourse of equity. For example, "If, instead, researchers discuss pay equality for teachers, they can reposition rural education challenges by understanding how policy inequitably privileges place" (Biddle and Azano, 2016, p.315). This approach may offer comparisons between factors related to common, quantitative, experiences of educators, but it does not account for factors or

experiences that are unique to the diverse contexts in which teachers teach. Despite all that is known about the history of rural education and the diversity of educational needs in rural communities, preparation programs for pre-service teachers focus primarily on the needs of students in urban communities.

The urban normativity of the broader field of education is well documented in the literature (Biddle & Azano 2016; Biddle, Sutherland, & McHenry-Sorber 2019; Burdick-Will & Logan, 2017, Isserman, 2005; LaGarry, Lavalley, Johnson & Howley, 2015; Schafft, 2016; Sherwood, 2001; Thomas et. al. 2011). In a report published in 2018 by the Center for Public Education, Lavalley stated, "This urban-centric approach leaves the assets and concerns of rural communities unaddressed, and as a consequence, leads to funding and reform mechanisms that do not accommodate the rural context (Johnson & Howley, 2015)" (2018, p.23). Schafft (2016) reported that "urban" is mentioned in the titles of major academic journals 16 times more frequently than rural. Furthermore, the current pressures of accountability and academic achievement sparked by the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act 2001, 2002 has refocused the discussion on the quality of teachers and administrators and their influence on student outcome. Darling- Hammond (2003), in *Keeping good teachers: Why it matters and what leaders can do,* stated that, "Substantial evidence suggests that, among all school resources, good teachers are the most important determinant of student achievement" (p.2). If this is indeed the case, then attention to the teaching context and preparation of all teachers is of utmost importance and rural communities should be included in the discourse of 21st century education reform initiatives and scholarly research.

Defining Rural

One of the biggest challenges to rural education research is defining rural (Christiaens, 2015; Coburn, MacKinney, McBride, Mueller, Slifkin & Wakefield 2007; Coladarci, 2007; Cromartie & Bucholtz, 2008; Freeman & Randolph; Hart, Larson & Lishner, 2005; Hawley, Kozoil, Bovaird, McCormack, & Welch 2016; Howley, Theobald, & S. C. Howley, 2005; Moffa & McHenry-Sorber, 2018; Nespar, 2008; U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). There is no one definition that provides an efficient theoretical construct of rural education research (Coburn et al., 2007; Coladarci, 2007; Cromartie & Bucholtz, 2008; Hart, Larson, Lishner, 2005; Howley, Theobald, & S. C. Howley, 2005; Hawley, Koziol, Bovaird, McCormick, & Greg, 2016). Some describe rural as what is left over after urban is defined (Farmer, 1997) and not non-metropolitan (Isserman, 2005; Roberts & Green, 2013). The United State Census Bureau identifies rural as "all population, housing, and territory not included in an urban area" defining urban as a community with 2500 people or more (Census Urban and Rural Classification and Urban Area Criteria, 2010). Jordan and Hargrove (1987) go so far as to declare the "operationalization of rural as a nagging problem" for rural education research (p.15). Hawley et al. (2016) explored the difficulty in defining rural in their analysis of definitions of rural in articles published in Rural Special Education Quarterly between 2011 and 2014. What they found was that only 14 of the 44 articles reviewed employed a standardized federal or state-based definition with 27 of the remaining 30 articles providing a narrative description of context and the rest no definition at all: exposing the lack of consistency. They did not suggest that the definitions used were incorrect but rather incomplete needing a more "precise" description of the characteristics of the rural context of the study. The authors concluded that, "When several definitions are reasonable, it is up to the researcher to provide a precise explanation of the construct and tailor the research to a particular definition, thereby allowing future researchers to evaluate and critique how the

construct, in this case rurality, was operationalized (Shadish et al., 2002)" (Hawley, et al., 2016, p.5). Rich detailed information about the (rural) context of a study, including descriptions of the people, setting, and characteristics can provide more clarity of the generalizability of a study's findings (Coladarci, 2007). Additionally, the authors recommend the use of Brown and Schafft's (2011) four dimensions of defining rural places. The dimensions are 1) population and settlement structure and landscape, 2) economy, 3) institutions, and 4) socio-cultural.

The U.S. Census Bureau (USCB) defines rural communities as places with populations of less than 2500 residents. The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) defines rural by population and geographic distance to an urbanized area (population of 50,000 or more residents) or urban cluster (population of less than 50,000 but 2,500 or more residents). Rural falls into these three geographic distance categories:

Rural – Fringe, a census-defined rural territory that is less than or equal to 5 miles from an urbanized area, as well as rural territory that is less than or equal to 2.5 miles from an urban cluster.

Rural – Distant, a census-defined rural territory that is more than 5 miles but less than or equal to 25 miles from an urbanized area, as well as rural territory that is more than 2.5 miles but less than or equal to 10 miles from an urban cluster, and

Rural – Remote, a census-defined rural territory that is more than 25 miles from an urbanized area and also more than 10 miles from an urban cluster.

The American Community Survey (ACS) reports, "54.4 percent of people living in rural areas are within a metro area". Because county rather than population define metro areas, rural populations frequently overlap into counties identified as metropolitan statistical areas. This "blurring of the lines" creates even more confusion when defining rural.

The literature review revealed many other considerations when defining rural. Schaefer, Mattingly, and Johnson (2016) reported that poverty exists in America at higher rates in rural counties (64%) than urban counties (47%). Descriptive considerations such as school and community interdependence (Collins et al., 2001; Herzog & Pittman, 2003; Johnson & Howley, 2015; Kannapel & DeYoung, 1999; Lane & Dorfman, 1997; Lavalley, 2016; Seal & Harmon, 1995; Stern, 1994), teacher (Barley & Brigham, 2008; Clifford, 2013; Darling-Hammond, & Carver-Thomas, 2016; Ellis, 2008; Fishman, 2015; Gagnon & Mattingly, 2012; Johnson, & Hartman, 2017; Kollie, 2007; LaGarry & Richard, 2018; Lamkin, 2006; Lavalley, 2018; McHenry-Sorber & Campbell, 2019; Roberts & Green, 2013; Showalter, Klein, Jimerson, 2003; Steed, Pomerleau, Muscott, & Rohde, 2013; Strange, 2011; Sue, 2013; Sutcher, Timar & Carter, 2017) and administrator recruitment (Chance & Capps, 1990; Czaja & Harman, 1997; Fishman, 2015; Grady & Bryant, 1991; Roberts & Green, 2013), financial status (Molefe, Proger, & Burke 2017; Schafft, 2016), and migration (Johnson, Mitchel, & Rotherham, 2014; Showalter et al., 2018-19) are additional characteristics that might impact an operational definition of a rural context. Rural communities and their people are as diverse as the environments in which they live. Rich descriptions of rural contexts are necessary to communicate the diverse characteristics of this population. The history of rural education shows us that reform efforts made without consideration of local community characteristics, strengths and needs in mind fail to value local culture and improve rural education.

Mark (2000) cautioned that research could be misleading when constructs are defined too broadly, too narrowly, or the wrong construct is identified or incorrectly identified. For example, rural is defined too broadly when referred to as what is left over after urban has been defined (Farmer, 1997; Isserman, 2005; U.S. Census Bureau, 2016). Hawley, Koziol, Bovaird,

McCormick, & Welch (2016) recommended a narrative approach to defining rural, allowing for a rich contextual description that provides readers with "sufficient detail about the study's geographic context" (p. 4). "Getting rural right does not mean picking one definition but, rather, providing clear, detailed information to readers so they understand how the rural context is delineated from other contexts" (Hawley et al., 2016, p. 4). Other researchers also recommended detailed descriptions of context when several construct labels are available to ensure validity (Bosak &. Perlman, 1982; Coladarci, 2007; Ford, 1966; Jordan &. Hargrove, 1987; Shadish et al., 2002). Providing rich descriptions of context in rural research and explanation of how the construct of rurality is being operationalized is necessary to identify if the phenomenon being studied is "inherently rural" (Coladarci, 2007) or generalizable across rural contexts. Coladarci (2007) described the appropriate amount of detail as "the provision of sufficient information about the context in which the research was conducted so that readers can make informed judgments regarding generalizability" (p. 2). Hawley et al. (2016) recommended that when choosing a rural definition, researchers consider two major questions: (a) what community characteristics are important in my study's conceptualization of rurality and (b) what level of classification is most appropriate for my study's objectives?

This leads to another matter of consideration in the field of rural education research. Does a phenomenon have to be "inherently rural" (Coladarci, 2007) to be of value to rural education research? How does one define what is "inherently rural" when so many definitions of rural exist? Given the difficulty of defining rural, and the diversity of rural communities, rural education researchers continue to be challenged by the lack of a common classification of rural (Hawley et al., 2016). Hawley et al. recommended using Brown and Schafft's (2011) four dimensions for describing rural places and at least one of the major classifications of rural when

defining the context of rural studies. Determining what is or is not "inherently rural" (Coladarci, 2007) begins with clearly defining the rural context of what is studied.

Section Summary – Rural Education Research

It is evident from the review of the history of rural education research that a one size fits all definition of rurality cannot adequately represent the diverse and unique characteristics of rural communities and their educational needs. Defining rural community education as a "rural school problem" lacking modernity and the desired progressive characteristics of urban education systems failed to consider the strengths and needs of these communities. The push to bring modern education to rural communities was perhaps well intentioned but lacked a true understanding of what these communities had to offer. The implication that rural education was a problem to be solved rather than a system to be developed set the stage for limited results and even failure. Subsequently, many of the challenges faced by rural communities to provide quality education to their students still exist today.

> Lack of carefully trained and experienced teachers, short terms of school, poorly constructed schoolhouses, insufficient equipment, annual or semi-annual change of teachers, enrollment too small for best results, many grades and small classes, limited social opportunities for teachers, inconvenient boarding places, teachers not in touch with life of community, and community not vitally interested in the schools. (Dewey, 1910, p. 542)

In this statement Dewey recognized the need for relationship building between the teachers/institution and the community. When our educational system fails to identify community strengths it ignores the very qualities that can make the system thrive.

Donella Meadows (2009) states, "We cannot impose our will on a system. We can listen to what the system tells us and discover how its properties and our values can work together to bring forth something much better than could ever be produced by our will alone" (pp.169-70). A system, as defined by Meadows "is a set of things—people, cells, molecules, or whatever—interconnected in such a way that they produce their own pattern of behavior over time" (2009, p. 2). Outside forces can influence a system and the system's response is characteristic of itself, meaning the system will respond based upon its own culture and pattern of behavior. A system consists of elements, interconnections, and a function or purpose (Meadows, 2009). Moreover, timely and clear communication is essential for systems to work efficiently and effectively (Fullan 2004, 2005; Meadows, 2009). Rural educational systems are unique to their location and the culture and values of the communities that they serve. Early initiatives to expose rural youth to "high culture" implied that progress and opportunity only existed outside of their rural communities, creating a pattern of outmigration of youth still experienced today. Later efforts in the 1920's and 1930's use of a deficit description of rural education was financially advantageous to reform efforts and the development of teacher preparation programs specifically directed toward rural education; however, these programs continued to perpetuate a stereotype that devalued rural culture and communities. In the mid-to late 1900, post-World War II, reform efforts moved away from a rural education focus. Rural education scholars began to question the equity of education reform and its impact on the culture of rural communities. A trend toward the valuing of community context as a tool for student learning emerged in the late 1900's – 2000's. Placed-based pedagogies that recognize the value of "a sense of place" or "place attachment" as a "conceptual counter to the global rhetoric of both educational purpose and curriculum (Azano, 2011; Azano & Stewart, 2015; Epply, 2009; C. Howley & Howley, 2014) (Biddle & Azano.

2016, p. 314)" appeared to provide a new lens for studying the relevance of learning context to curricular outcomes (Azano & Stewert, 2015, 2016). The move away from the "rural school problem" deficit model of rurality and the valuing of community context as a lens for understanding the needs of diverse populations can inform current reform initiatives across communities. Youth in today's global social, economic and technological environment need not abandon their community heritage and values to be successful and competitive in the workforce. It is the responsibility of education reformers to investigate ways to identify community strengths and resources and to use these strengths and resources to foster learning, preparing students for the modern age. Initiatives to change learning environments to impose the will of a standardized model of education need to be replaced with a system that works with the existing system to "…bring forth something much better than could ever be produced by our will alone" (Meadows, 2009, p. 170).

When conducting rural education research, a clear, descriptive, contextual definition of rural will allow readers to determine the generalizability of findings across contexts, rural and otherwise. As previously stated, Hawley et al. recommended using Brown and Schafft's (2011) four dimensions for describing rural places (population and settlement structure and landscape, economy, institutions, and socio-cultural) and at least one of the major classifications of rural when defining the context of rural studies to mitigate the difficulty rural education researchers have when defining rural.

Singleton Educator – Studies

A singleton is commonly a lone teacher who is solely responsible for teaching a specialty subject, such as art, technology, and physics, or any teacher singly responsible for teaching a subject in a building or district (Ferriter et al., 2013; Hansen, 2015; Venables, 2011). Singleton

grade level or subject teachers are common in small or rural districts (Ferriter et al., 2013; Hansen, 2015; Richmond & Manokore, 2011). Singleton educators face unique challenges due to the nature of their teaching assignments. Because singleton educators are the only ones in their building or district who teach their unique subject, they are isolated from colleagues who share their content domain. Isolation in general education is well-documented (Akin, 2001; Calabrese, 1986; Carpentier-Roy, 1992; DuFour, 1999; Flinders, 1988; Lortie, 1975; Russell, 1996; Schlichte, Yssel, & Merbler, 2005; Smith & Scott, 1990; Thompson & Hamilton, 1991; Zielinski & Hoy, 1983; and others). However, there is limited research focused specifically on the phenomenon of the singleton educator (Hagin, 2020; Sindberg 2011; Sindberg & Lipscomb 2005; Wilson, Schweingruber, & Nielsen, 2015). This literature review presents five U. S. studies that specifically target singleton educators as participants in the research. Although the autonomy of being a singleton educator can be liberating (Gaikwad & Brantely, 1982), the challenges of being a lone educator in one's field within a teaching community are nuanced and complex. The literature reveals that singleton educators can feel isolated (Calabreze, 1986; Flinders, 1988; Gaikwood & Brantley, 1992; Krueger 2003; Lorte, 1975; Robert, 1973), undervalued (Eisner, 1992; Scheib 2006; Sindberg, 2011) and alienated (Gordon, 2000; Hamann & Gordon, 2000; Scheib, 2006; Sindberg, 2011). Efforts to include singletons in collegiate professional development within district have exposed the need for support for these educators to access professional development communities that share their discipline (Battersby & Verdi, 2015; Berwager, 2013; Cohen-Evron, 2002; Freedman, 2007; Gates, 2010; Hanawalt, 2016; Hanes & Schiller, 1994; Hochtritt, Thulson, Delaney, Dornbush, & Shay, 2014; Milbrandt, 2006; Vanderlip-Taylor, 2018). More information describing the phenomenon of the singleton educator

is necessary to better accommodate their unique characteristics and needs (Ferriter et al. 2013; Hansen 2015; Hagin, 2020; Sindberg, 2014).

Method for Synthesis of the Literature

To collect and analyze the research literature on the phenomenon of the singleton educator I used Syracuse University's library databases, Google, and Google Scholar. Additionally, I drew from books and articles collected from my previous research that identify characteristics of singleton educators. I applied the following key terms to this section of my literature review "singleton", "singleton educator", "lone educator", "isolation", and "isolation in teaching", then adding "singletons and professional development". This search focused on academic books and articles and peer reviewed research studies in the United States after 2000 revealing a selection of studies and journal articles mentioning singleton educators in the context of professional development. After discovering limited studies relating to singleton educators, I expanded my search to outside the U.S to see if relevant studies existed in other countries. The search revealed two studies one in Australia (Davidson & Dwyer, 2014), and one in Scotland (Cutts, Robertson, Donaldson, & O'Donnell, 2017). Although the participants in these two studies were singleton subject educators (Music and Computer Science), the studies focused on participant feedback to largescale professional development initiatives and not on the phenomenon of the singleton educator. There were, however, several articles and studies that identify the prevalence of professional isolation in general education (Achilles & Gaines, 1991; Akin, 2001; Calabrese, 1986; Carpentier-Roy, 1992; DuFour, 1999; Flinders, 1988; Levine, 1989;Lortie, 1975; Martin & McGrevin, 1990; Moran, 1990; Rosenholtz, 1985; Russell,1996; Schlichte, Yssel, & Merbler, 2005; Smith & Scott,1990; Smith & Scott; 1990; Thompson & Hamilton, 1991, and others). I then applied the terms "singletons and art," and "singleton art

teacher," to explore the availability of literature on art education in the context of a singleton environment, which yielded one study specific to art education and limited articles describing the challenges of providing professional development specifically for arts teachers. I also researched online for support resources for singletons and found a Blog entitled "All Things PLC: Singletons and Small Schools" provided by Solution Tree and a guide published for professional learning communities (PLC) entitled *How to Develop PLCs for Singletons and Small Schools* written by Aaron Hansen and published by Single Tree in 2015.

What is a Singleton Teacher?

A *singleton* teacher is a teacher who is the only educator teaching a specific discipline within a building or district, for example, a lone business, technology, family and consumer science, drama, band, or art teacher would be considered a singleton (Ferriter et al., 2013; Hansen, 2015; Venables, 2011). Additionally, in smaller districts, this could include a lone grade level teacher or a content specialist such as a physics, visual technology, or algebra teacher (Ferriter, Graham, & Wight, 2013; Hansen, 2015; Richmond & Manokore, 2011). One characteristics/condition that contributes to the phenomenon of singleton educators is that they tend to be more common in small systems where there is no need or funding for multiple educators in one discipline (Ferriter et al. 2013, Hansen, 2015). An educator could be a singleton in one discipline, but not another, within a single teaching placement, such as an elementary teacher who has the sole responsibility for teaching science for their grade level or a high school biology teacher who also teaches advanced placement physics.

Hagin (2020) in her study of singleton secondary science teachers, reported, "Singletons need continuous training in content knowledge and pedagogical content knowledge to improve their learning and thus improve student learning (Loucks-Horsley, Stiles, Mundry, Love, &

Hewson, (2010); Loughran, Berry, & Mulhall, 2012; Shulman, 1986)" (p. 158). Yet, there is a "…*paucity* of literature and research on the topic of singleton teachers and their professional development needs…" (Hagin, 2020, p.53). Wilson et al., (2015) also reported a "large gap" in the literature citing a call for an understanding of the professional development needs of singletons. This author's literature review also revealed that limited studies and information pertaining specifically to singleton educators is available. There is, however, a small body of work that references the circumstances of singleton educators in conjunction with the study of teacher isolation and/or professional development. The following section will examine five U.S. studies that specifically identify and explore the phenomenon of singleton educator, then review these studies in the context of current school reform efforts and teacher professional development. This review will demonstrate that there is empirical evidence demonstrating the need for professional development programming designed specifically for singletons and that more information is needed about the lived experiences of singletons, within and across domains, to inform the development of comprehensive professional development communities that serve their needs.

Study 1 Hagin (2020) Dissertation Study - Secondary Science Singletons

Tracey Hagin (2020) conducted a qualitative, multiple-site, multiple case study of the professional learning experiences of four singleton secondary science teachers. *The Elementary and Secondary Education Act* (ESEA, 1965) and later revised 2001 *No Child Left Behind* (NCLB) and then 2015 *Every Student Succeeds Act (*ESSA) mandate that districts provide teachers professional development (PD) to improve their content and pedagogical knowledge as part of the criteria to receive federal funding. Districts must provide teachers personalized, ongoing, and job-embedded PD opportunities that are data driven, collaborative, regularly

evaluated and part of the school's improvement plan (Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development [ASCD], 2015; USDOE, 2015). Hagin's problem statement juxtaposes current trends in teacher professional development that require the formation of "same-subject or same-grade level" Professional Learning Communities (PLC) with the complexity of the PD needs and circumstances of singleton science educators. Hagin defined PLC's as "communities of continuous inquiry and improvement because their goal is to enhance the effectiveness of its teachers as professionals for the student's benefit (DuFour et al., 2010; Hairon, Goh, Chua, & Wang, 2017)." (pp. 3-4). Because singleton teachers are often placed in interdisciplinary or nontraditional learning communities (Hansen, 2015), singleton science teachers do not have "common content peers with whom to collaborate" and therefore, it is uncertain if their needs are being met (p.5).

Hagin defines singleton as a lone educator assigned to a given course or grade-level within their school. The objective of the study was to "discover and describe, through interviews and observations, the professional learning experiences of four singleton secondary science teachers" (p. 1). Hagin cited the importance of professional development for science educators to fulfill the need for content specific knowledge (Loucks-Horsley, Stiles, Mundry, Love, & Hewson, 2010; Wilson, Schweingruber & Nielsen, 2015) and the implementation of *A Framework for K-12 Science Education* and the *Next Generation Science Standards* (National Research Council [NRC], 2013) as justifications for this study. Additionally, she identified secondary science teachers as singletons since they often do not have a same-content partner in their building with which to collaborate. The overarching research question was "How is successful professional learning designed to meet the needs of singleton secondary science teachers?" (Hagin 2020, p. 6). The supporting guiding questions were 1) How do singleton

secondary science teachers describe their professional learning experiences? a. How does job-embedded professional development, such as the school learning community, contribute to their professional learning experiences? b. How do other, or outside, professional development options contribute to their professional learning experiences? 2) How do singleton secondary science teachers describe the meaning of their experiences within their school learning community? 3) How are their collaborative experiences relevant to their professional learning needs?

A qualitative case-study method was used to investigate singleton science teachers' experiences with professional development. Hagin employed inductive and deductive methods of analysis (Creswell, 2014; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Patton, 2015) to gain a deeper understanding of participants' descriptions of their PD experiences. Four cases were chosen from various county and city schools across northwest Georgia for this study. The criteria for the selections required that the teachers had at least four years teaching experience and "participated in an interdisciplinary or non-traditional" professional learning community (PLC). Data collection methods included three in-depth interviews (Seidman, 2013), observations, and (PLC) document analysis.

Hagin described her positionality as a secondary science teacher with 18 years of experience who also participated in a content-specific PLC. Additionally, she identified personal experience from being a singleton teacher. Creswell (2007) states that it is important to position oneself when telling the stories of others. In this study, the author used triangulation of data sources, analytic memo writing, and peer debriefing to ensure subjectivity. The following research assumptions were identified: secondary science teachers require professional development (PD), teachers have characteristics that allow them to be self-directed adult

learners, PLCs are effective means for PD, secondary science teachers may not receive the PD they need. Hagin referenced the pronounced gap in the literature regarding professional development for singleton educators. Additionally, she cited two studies Battersby & Verdi (2015) & Cutts, Roberson, Donaldson & O'Donnell (2017) that characterize that the isolation of singletons warrants a call for assembling (non-traditional) PLCs. Hagin identified the need for a qualitative approach to her research question(s). She stated that this study needed to make meaning of singleton science teachers lived experiences. "To achieve this goal, the researcher must understand how singletons interpreted their professional learning experiences, how they constructed their professional knowledge, and how they attributed meanings to their professional learning experiences" (Hagin, 2020, p. 56). Hagin identified her philosophical perspective for this study as rooted in social constructivism (Creswell, 2014, Patton, 2015) and interpretivism (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) accepting that meaning is constructed from a complexity of views and that there is no single reality.

By using a purposeful sample (Merriam, 1988) Hagin selected participants that had experienced the phenomenon she is sought to study. She used demographic information to ensure that the variation in cases would provide rigorous cross case analysis for this study (Yin, 2014). Using a semi-structured format (both structured and open-ended questions) (Creswell, 2014; Merriam, 1998; Patton, 2015; and Yin, 2014), Hagin conducted three 45–60-minute interviews with each participant. After each of the first two interviews, she conducted observations of the participants in learning communities. An observation protocol was used to identify participants' routines, triangulate findings, provide context, and to reveal behaviors potentially not identified in the interviews (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 139). Another source of data was from the school learning communities' meeting documents, which provided a third source for the triangulation of

data. Triangulation promotes the credibility of findings (Creswell, 2014; Patton, 2015; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Interview questions were tested in an informal pilot study to ensure their effectiveness in aligning with the research questions (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Seidman, 2013). An expert panel was enlisted to design an interview protocol to make sure each consecutive interview promoted the investigations of the research questions. Descript was used to transcribe the record the interview data (www.transana.org). The transcripts were hand-coded by the researcher in Microsoft Word. To ensure credibility of the study, Hagin used triangulation of data (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Yin, 2014), member-checks (Creswell, 2014; Merriam, 1998; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Yin, 2014), peer debriefing (Creswell, 2014; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016), analytic memo writing (Saldaña, 2016), and in-case and cross case analysis. She identified the limitations of qualitative research and the case study method describing the role of bias in the interview process (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Yin, 2014), researcher presence (Patton, 2015), case boundaries – small number of cases (Merriam, 1998) and research questions - formatting (Patton, 2015).

Each of the singleton educators interviewed were lone science teachers in his/her building. The study revealed several observations associated with the phenomenon of being a singleton science educator. In one case, the teacher shared a content area with other teachers in his building but taught two singleton courses in science that were not taught by any of his peers. He was included in a professional development community (PDC) with his content peers for the shared course but had to look outside of the school community for content peers in his singleton courses. For one of the courses, Zoology, he was not able to find an outside PDC in which to participate. For the other course, he attended summer professional development and did connect

with other educators in his discipline but the informal nature and lack of mentorship of this "learning community" did not fulfill his PD needs.

In the second case, the veteran teacher served as a singleton educator teaching chemistry. The teacher had many years of experience teaching a variety of science courses, participated in outside professional development, and taught applied physics at a local college. He participated in the school, grade level, PLC meetings for the science educators and served as the department chair. The previous year he shared the chemistry class with a novice teacher with whom he collaborated regularly. In this role, he served as mentor, and he indicated that he missed and benefited from the experience and the fresh perspective it provided. Expert veterans can benefit from mentoring and coaching other teachers, it keeps them excited and stimulated in their discipline and creates an incentive for them remain in the teaching profession (Darling-Hammond, 2003).

The third case described a female singleton teacher who had a young family. Her district required teachers to participate in a school-wide PLC as well as department PLC. Meetings for these PLC's were scheduled into the school day. She taught two singleton courses and actively sought out professional development and peer communities for these courses outside of school. She described several shortcomings of participating in these "outside" communities. Scheduling around family during out of school time is difficult. Although as a new (content) teacher she was eager to gain content and pedagogical knowledge, she felt intimidated by the "more knowledgeable" PLC members. Being unfamiliar with the content and terminology left her feeling "completely lost" during the meetings and uncomfortable with asking questions.

Heider (2005) stated that finding ways to help teachers feel comfortable with discussing issues without feeling "inept" is essential to the success of professional development. Guskey

(2003) defined time (and resources) as one of the five essential characteristics of effective PD programs. The other four characteristics are increase in teacher's content and pedagogical knowledge, promotion of collegiality and collaboration, set procedures for evaluation, and aligning with other reform initiatives. Others also cite time and time management as a hindrance to teacher collaboration and professional development (Beer & Beer, 1992; Boyle, Borg, Falzon, & Baglioni, A. J., 1995; Flinders, 1988; Lortie, 1975; Montalvo, A., Bair, & Boor, 1995; Solman & Feld, 1989). "Because instructional demands typically surpass available resources, the teacher's work is never finished in any definitive sense" (Flinders, 1988, p. 23).

The fourth case described a fourth-year teacher who teaches a singleton AP Physics course. The school provided time for a school-wide PLC and department PLC. The participant previously participated in outside PD training for her AP physics course but did not participate in a PLC in this content area at the time of the study. She reported a strong personal and professional connection to her science department PLC and referred to them as "her team".

A common theme from these case studies is the need to dedicate time for content specific collegial interaction. Out-of-school PLCs require time away from family and other responsibilities making it hard to participate in these communities. Despite the commitment of out-of-school time, each of the participants did make time to improve his/her content knowledge and pedagogy for the singleton courses taught, even if it did not result in an ongoing PLC. Two participants explicitly described benefits from collaborative planning and participation in a PLC. One identified the benefit of learning by sharing new approaches and ideas, and one described a feeling of belonging to a team. This study did not address other aspects of the phenomenon of the singleton educator, such as physical and emotional isolation, peer value for singleton content, content specific limitations and demands, and access (how to connect to content communities).

The findings of this study indicated the following: all four participants engaged in the work of their PLCs with most of them "giving the group credit for developing educator professionalism and collaborative collegiality" (Hagin, 2020, p. 141). All four gained content knowledge and pedagogical content knowledge from working with their group. The participants differed in their experiences as singletons since some of the teachers taught other courses that they shared with another colleague, changing their role as singleton. This variation created dissimilarities in responses to the overarching research question (How is successful professional learning designed to meet the needs of singleton secondary science teachers?) and question 3 (How are their collaborative experiences relevant to their professional learning needs?). All participants indicated they had little direction from their administration to guide their PLCs. Three of the four were placed in PLCs for subjects other than their singleton course(s). Only one met with an outside PLC(W) that was specific to her singleton course. None of the participants had training in PLC protocols and principles (Dufour, Dufour, Eaker, & Many, 2010). All appreciated the PCK they received from their PLC content peers, however, only one participant participated in an online PLCW with content peers in her singleton subject. All subjects used online sources to supplement their content. What was notably absent was PCK support for the singleton teachers who attended PLCs for other (shared) content courses. All participants identified that PLCs contributed to educator professionalism and student achievement although one participant found their experience to be inadequate for her content learning. Some identified that larger PLCs were structured more like faculty meetings indicating an inappropriate use of the term PLC. One participant that belonged to multiple PLCs felt her personal investment was "stretched". Receiving PCK within their PLCs was identified as relevant to each teacher's needs. One respondent identified that her online PLCW was not effective for her PD needs in

that the pace and timing of the content discussions did not match her curriculum schedule. Additionally, it was her first time teaching the course and she felt intimidated by the more experienced group. This contradicts earlier claims that on-line PLC can provide novice educators with a "safe place" to seek mentorship and PD. The participants identified that "lack of collegial collaboration, lack of time, ineffective structure, lack of CK learning, and lack of resources or training" are all inhibitors of successful professional development for singletons (Hagin, 2020, p. 151-152). Only one of the four participants had access to a content specific PLC to promote her PCK while the other three sought out this information from outside sources. The singleton teachers enjoyed the freedom to design and pace the curriculum and valued their autonomy. Each of the participants identified positive experiences with collaboration that contributed to their PD. All members identified time as an inhibitor to participation in a PLC. As earlier reported, time often identified as an inhibitor to teacher professional development (Dodor et al. 2010; Newman, 2019) and resources.

Hagin made the following recommendations: professional learning coordinators should develop content-specific, face to face, collaborative communities for singleton science educators and facilitate opportunities for inside and outside development of content-specific PD for science educators. Districts should provide training in the procedures and principles of PLCs including tools to implement the process. In her discussion, Hagin identified the following limitations of the study. The participants, although initially carefully selected, did not meet all the criteria of the study once conducted. Not all participants were true singletons with some teaching non-singleton courses. Each school did not follow the same mandate for job-embedded PL(C)s. The small number of cases did not provide enough within-case analysis due to the circumstances of the participants and restricted availability of PLCs for singleton content courses. Hagan

recommended that additional studies be conducted to study "true singletons" to compare to these findings and to conduct a quantitative study of singleton science teachers to survey if their professional learning needs are being met across the state or nation.

Advantages and Limitations of Study 1

Hagin's methods, methodology, and theoretical perspective were well defined for this study. Hagin used triangulation of data (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Yin, 2014), member-checks (Creswell, 2014; Merriam, 1998; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Yin, 2014), peer debriefing (Creswell, 2014; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016), analytic memo writing (Saldaña, 2016), and in-case and cross case analysis to ensure reliability of the findings. Additionally, Hagin established her experiences as a singleton science educator and potential bias as researcher. Careful selection of interview questions and peer-reviewed protocols established a sequence of three interviews to ensure she progressed to the objectives of the research questions. Hagin piloted the interview questions with several singleton colleagues, reflected upon the responses, and adjusted as needed (Seidman, 2013) to ensure the questions supported the study's guiding questions (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Seidman, 2013). Hagin also piloted her observational protocols and enlisted an expert panel to provide feedback and further ensure the alignment of the data collection process. The collection of observational data and PLC documents, along with the interview transcripts allowed for a triangulation of the data, adding clarity and context to her understanding of her participants' lived experience. The first interview provided participant context (Seidman, 2013). General structured questions were used to gather information regarding the participant's career path, courses taught, routines, and collaboration, etc. to "better understand what each says, does, and means in relation to their experiences (Merriam, 1998; Patton, 2015)" (p. 69). Second interview questions focused on concrete details, not opinions, of participants' experiences within

their school learning communities. The third interview targeted participants meaning making (Seidman, 2013) of their professional learning. Interview questions were refined to fit the context of each participant's experience and to add clarification. Hagin analyzed the data and used member checks to confirm her interpretations of the participant's responses. Observational data was collected after the first and second interview within each participant's learning community and focused on criteria such as participant's role, site layout, routines, and relevancy of PD to participant's content specialty. Document analysis was also employed to analyze documents produced by the school learning community, although this information was not available for all participants. Hagin's methodology was appropriate for this study eliciting information to answer her guiding question of "How is successful professional learning designed to meet the needs of singleton secondary science teachers?" (p. 6). The information collected from the lived experiences of these singleton science educators shed light on the complexity of this topic.

Hagin's use of a qualitative case study methodology allowed her to explore the PD experiences of her participants as singleton science educators and co-create meaning from these experiences (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Creswell, 2014; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Patton, 2015). Hagin chose constructivism (Patton, 2015), social constructivism (Creswell, 2014) and interpretivism (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) as the philosophical lens for her study. This inductive data analysis process and constructivist worldview allows Hagin to create a "picture" of the singleton science teacher's PD experience (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). Additionally, Hagin was particularly cognoscente of the importance of context as part of the meaning-making process of qualitative research. The qualitative researcher understands the importance of context when analyzing and interpreting the data they collect (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Geertz, 1973). "To

divorce the act, word, or gesture from its context is, for the qualitative researcher, to lose sight of significance" (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007, p. 5).

The limitation(s) of the study rests primarily in the eventual selection of the subjects. Only one of the subjects participated in a PLC focused specifically on her singleton subject area. Others, although singletons in one subject, were not singletons in all their subjects and participated in PLCs relating to their shared subjects; therefore, not providing the singleton perspective as expected. Additionally, as Hagin discovered, PLCs for singleton courses are not always readily available and as one respondent stated, the pace and timing of the PLCW did not always sync with her schedule, affecting its effectiveness and her interview responses.

Although these limitations are evident, there is value in the findings identifying that the conditions of singleton educators' experiences are complex and varied. Clearly, this is a complex issue with nuanced challenges and considerations that need to be explored as part of the process of developing PLCs for singletons. The findings might also suggest, at least for the communities studied, that there is a need for an organized network or structure for developing PLCs for singleton science educators.

Study 2 Dodor, Sira, and Hausafus (2010) Family and Consumer Science Singletons

Bernice Dodor, Natalia Sira, and Cheryl Hausafus (2010) conducted a study of Family and Consumer Science (FCS) singleton teachers. Their objective was to "determine the characteristics of FCS teachers who use electronic bulletin boards and examine the frequencies and content of messages and interactions they create" (Dodor, Sira, & Hausafus, 2010, p. 1). In introducing the circumstances of FAC educators, Dodor, Sira, and Hausafus described that these educators are often the only FAC content teacher in their school building or district; thus, making them a singleton (Hansen, 2015; Venables, 2011). Additionally, teachers in specialty content

areas such as FAC, art, music, band, physical education, technology, etc. are often isolated within their buildings. Cookson (2005) described the isolating nature of the "egg crate" (Lortie, 1975) structure of school buildings that segregate teachers from one another. This is particularly true for special area teachers whose content areas may require unique spaces often located in isolated areas of the building. The research questions addressed in this study were: (1) What are the characteristics of FCS teachers who use computer-mediated communication networks? (2) What are the frequencies of message threads on the electronic bulletin boards? (3) What is the content of the messages of interaction? (4) What topics promoted the greatest exchange of ideas? (5) What are the experiences of informants who use electronic bulletin boards?

The authors used ecological systems theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) and social network theory (Kadushin, 2005) as the theoretical lens to design and evaluate the data in this study. Ecological system theory accounts for the individual development that occurs throughout one's life as a result of the interactions between individuals and groups over time (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998). Each layer of one's environment, person, process, context, and time have a powerful and dynamic impact on human development. Dodor et al. explain it this way:

> Ecological system views the environment as nested systems that include the microsystem (immediate context and relationships, for example, activities and interaction patterns in individual's immediate surrounding such as family activities and family relationships); mesosystem (interrelationships between microsystems linked to the person, for example, parent –child interaction at home is likely to affect teacher-child interaction at school and vice versa) and macrosystem- (cultural norms and values). All of these systems interrelate and influence individual development on personal and professional levels (2010, p. 2).

According to social network theory, patterns and ties among people affect social behavior and communication (Kadushin, 2005). The authors link the availability of internet communications to the development of a sustainable social network to connect geographically dispersed individuals with shared interests, in this case isolated FCS teachers. According to the authors, this theory proposes that "the more people are socially connected, the more intensely they are likely to communicate using the various media available to them" (Dodor, et al., p.2).

With this as their theoretical lens, the researchers explored how a computer-mediated communications (CMC) network can facilitate teachers' professional development and mediate teacher isolation among FCS educators in three FCS electronic bulletin boards across the Worldwide Web. The e-groups were selected using criteria such as group size, time span of communication postings, and registration as FCS teacher Yahoo discussion group. The authors also enlisted a purposeful sampling of 12 "informants" with whom they collected survey data via private e-mails as part of this mixed methods, interpretive design (Creswell, 2008). They used constant comparative method, "generating and connecting categories by comparing incidents in the data to other incidents, incidents to categories, and categories to categories" (Creswell, p. 443).

The study was conducted over 12 months with 691 messages posted. Using QSR NUD*IST 4 software for analysis each bulletin post was coded according to the following categories, social, FCS pedagogy, nature of teaching, resources, professional development, inspirational, and reflective discourse. An FCS educator was enlisted to independently code one-fifth of the messages and the codes were compared to the researcher's codes with 90% agreement to ensure reliability. Additionally, descriptive data about each board was collected such as number of message postings, number of peer response (non-responses), and time of

posting. Because of the difficulty of gathering information regarding the demographics of all the participants, 12 informants were selected to participate in an e-mail survey collecting data such as age, gender, years of teaching experience, and educational attainment. From this data the researchers concluded that the teachers on these boards were "veterans and could serve as mentors for FCS beginning teachers" (Dodor et al., 2010, p.5).

Among the findings, FCS postings were more active during the beginning of the school year. Postings dropped off during breaks and over the summer. The authors attributed the school session drop off to the "business" of the teachers later in the semester and early semester eagerness to share resources, experiences, frustrations, and problems. Postings were more frequent during afterschool hours with the authors attributing this to teacher school time heavy workload. In the coding process, some messages were coded in more than one category creating a significant amount of variability in the number of messages in each category. Messages that coded as social and pertaining to resources were most frequent. Messages pertaining to inspiration were less common. Reflective discourse was common to all boards, but it was not a large proportion of the total message content category. Comments relating to pedagogy often referred to FCS programming, how to sustain a program, and FCS content. Sharing concerns, curriculum, teaching ideas and assessment tools were also identified as part of the discussions. The authors report that 80% of the survey respondents provided statements indicating that electronic bulletin boards validated their teaching. Other findings include that the use of electronic bulletin boards could promote best practices by providing innovative teaching resources. Teachers also engaged in conversations regarding professional development such as conferences and national board certification information. Reflective discourse was also identified as an asset to electronic bulletin boards with reference to the accessibility of this format to novice

teachers. Previous studies reference the anonymity that CMC's offer and that these forums can support novice educators who might be embarrassed to ask questions in an in-person environment. (Abbott, 2003; Casey, 1997; Heider, 2005; Lehman, Warfield, Palm, & Wood, 2001). The authors used this rationale to draw the same conclusions from their data even though they did not have the demographic data of all the participants and the 12 surveyed were all veteran teachers.

In their discussion, Dodor et al. highlighted the following conclusions: there was a marked difference between months and time of posts, many of the messages were done to "exchange ideas and to request, receive, and provide support for problems and tensions teachers were experiencing in their teaching" (2010, p. 9). Messages were supportive and encouraging, promoted professional development, content and pedagogy, some social content, and reflective discourse. The authors concluded that FCS computer-mediated communications "provide an effective means for developing collaboration among colleagues, peers, and mentors" (p. 10). This electronic format provided teachers with an avenue to find time to engage in conversations with peers and created a "safe place" for veteran and novice teachers to provide mutual moral support and "break down the barriers" of isolation.

Advantages and Limitations of Study 2

The advantages of the mixed methods used in this study are the accessibility of the participants due to the electronic means of communication and existing online communities, and the authenticity of the data collection. The online forum for discourse for these CFS teachers and professional relationships were already established. Additionally, the message boards were candid and uninhibited by the "presence" of the researcher. Participants self-selected to participate in the message boards and had intrinsic motivation to do so. What was missing from

this study were the details of these participants' lived experiences. Although this study employed mixed methods for data collection, without the contextual and demographic information of all the participants one could not accurately include the voices of all the informants (Creswell, 2008). Without these details, the researcher is left to make assumptions based upon their theoretical perspective or paradigm. At times, the findings seemed to draw conclusions that were not supported by evidence, such as if novice FCS teachers benefited from these electronic discussion boards or that age and/or years' experience are the only qualifiers to be a "veteran mentor". Holloway (2001) warns us that, *"The mere presence of a mentor is not enough; the mentor's knowledge of how to support new teachers and skill at providing guidance are also crucial"* (p. 85). The limitations of the data collection in this study are like the findings in following 2005 study by Sindberg and Lipscomb; however, in Sindberg and Lipscomb's study, the authors identified the limitations of their quantitative survey methods and acknowledged the need for participant contextual data gathered from interviews to construct meaning from the lived experiences of their subjects.

Study 3 Sindberg and Lipscomb (2005) Music Teacher Isolation

Laura Sindberg & Scott Lipscomb (2005) conducted an empirical study of the phenomenon of music teacher isolation. The report begins with Sindberg's personal report of isolation during her career as a music teacher. The authors described the pervasiveness of isolation among music educators citing the restrictive structures (Calabrese, 1986; Flinders, 1988; Gaikwood & Brantley, 1992; Lortie, 1975; Robert, 1973) and scheduling limitations (Lieberman & Miller, 1992; Lortie, 1975) in schools that prevent teacher interaction. Sindberg and Lipcomb (2005) cited feelings of isolation (Palmer, 1998) and lack of value (Eisner, 1992) associated with the teaching profession. The purpose of the study, in addition to responding to a

lack of literature in this area, was to "examine the extent to which school music teachers express feelings of professional isolation in their school setting and to determine possible causes of these feelings, as reported by teachers" (Sindberg & Lipcomb 2005, p. 2). Sindberg (2011) in her article entitled *Alone all together: The conundrum of music teacher isolation and connectedness,* quotes Nieto, 2003:

> "Teaching can be the loneliest of professions. The job of teaching consists mainly of working with students for most of the day, and teachers are unable to connect with colleagues during the workday in any but the most superficial of encounters. As they run from one task to another, from office to classroom to hall duty to staff room, teachers barely have time to think." (p. 77)

Sindberg wrote in 2011 that, "I was unable to understand my own experience of isolation until I left the classroom" (p.7). Sindberg & Lipscomb's (2005) study addressed two questions. "Do public school music teachers experience professional isolation? and What do music teachers report as being the causes of professional isolation?" (p. 2). The researchers conducted an empirical investigation using a five-point Likert-style survey response post-test only design. One hundred public school music teachers were randomly selected from over 4000 music teachers' names provided by the Illinois State Board of Education to be surveyed. Of those, 36 teachers responded. The respondents ranged from 1-42 years of teaching experience. A two-way ANOVA was conducted to explore the data. The themes the researchers examined were the impact of teaching experience and school setting on teachers' sense of isolation and its causes. The independent variables were teachers' years of experience and school setting (urban, sub-urban, and rural).

Seven responses related specifically to degrees of perceptions of isolation, for example, existence of isolation, sense of isolation from other music teachers, isolation due to classroom

location, subject matter, scheduling, lack of administrative support, and the beliefs about the effects of isolation on teaching. Of the 12 items on the survey, three statement responses elicited statistically significant differences between the groups and were the focus of the authors' report. The three identified statements were: "I feel isolated from other teachers in my building.", "I believe professional isolation is related to the subject I teach.", and I believe professional isolation has a negative effect on my teaching" (p. 10).

The groups of teachers were divided as follows, G1: 1-10 years, G2: 11-18 years, and G3: >18 years. The authors used a post-hoc Turkey honesty significant difference (HSD) test to determine the mean score of the data for each statement by age group. For the statement addressing "isolation from others in my building," teachers with less experience reported higher instances of feeling of isolation with more significance between G1 and G2 than G2 and G3. Indicating that newer teachers were more likely to experience feeling of isolation from others than experienced teachers. For the statement addressing isolation due to "subject I teach". An interesting finding was identified indicating that G1(novice) teachers and G 3 (veteran) teachers reported a higher level of feelings of isolation related to subject matter (I teach) than G2 (mid-career) teachers. For the statement addressing "professional isolation having a negative effect on my teaching", G1 indicated stronger negative effects on their teaching due to isolation than both G2 and G3. Again, G3 reported more negative effect than G2.

The findings in this study reflect the existing literature on the adverse effects of teacher isolation (Akin, 2001; Calabrese, 1986; DuFour, 1999; Flinders, 1988; Lortie, 1975; Schlichte, Yssel, & Merbler, 2005; Thompson & Hamilton, 1991, Zielinski & Hoy, 1983; and others). Additionally, this study also echoes research that identified that novice teachers require support and professional development in their early years of teaching. Isolation can be devastating for

novice teachers (Calabrese, 1986; DuFour, 1999; Rogers & Bubinski, 1999) and potentially have negative impact on their teaching. Teacher isolation is a pervasive problem in education and can lead to burn out (Gaikwad & Brantley, 1992; Carlson & Thomas, 2006) and teacher attrition (Calabrese,1986; Carroll & Fulton, 2004; Darling-Hammond, 2003; DuFour, 1999; Gordon, 2000; Hamann, 1990; Heider, 2005; Ingersoll, 2001, 2002; Krueger, 2000; Rogers & Bubinski, 1999; Scheib, 2006; Schlichte, Yssel, & Merbler, 2005, and others).

Advantages and Limitations Study 3

Although this quantitative study confirmed that professional isolation exists among music teachers and identified some of the when and where feelings of isolation occur, it does not identify the underlying causes of why and how music teachers feel professionally isolated. Sindberg (2014) recognized the need for additional research of this topic and later conducted a "phenomenological study of the lived experiences of professional isolation and connectedness among music teachers in one urban district" (p. 7). This qualitative approach addressed the question of "How do public school music teachers perceive and describe their experience of professional isolation and connectedness?" (p.8).

Darling-Hammond (2003) stated in Keeping Good Teachers: Why it Matters, What Leaders Can Do, "Probably the most important thing a school administrator at the school or district level can do to improve student achievement is to attract, *retain*, and support the continued learning of well-prepared and committed teachers" (p. 2). "Without good mentoring programs that reduce teacher isolation and encourage teachers to stay in the profession, it will be very difficult for school districts, especially low-income school districts, to fill these positions and keep them filled" (Heider, 2005, p.2). The difficulty with providing meaningful mentoring for novice singleton teachers is that they are the only content specialist in their building or

district, leaving them without a veteran teacher in their discipline to mentor them. This causes novice teachers to develop a "self-reliant" mentality (Lortie, 1975) adding to feelings of isolation.

Additional research is needed to determine the underlying cause(s) of feeling of isolation related to the "subject I teach". Both novice teachers and veteran teachers indicated that their content area added to their feeling of isolation, while it was less evident in the 11–18-year educators. Why is this? Goodlad, Sirotnik, & Overman (1979), in An Overview of 'A Study of Schooling', enlist the contextual nature of ecological theory to make sense out of the complex systemic characteristics of schools and the *elements* that function within them. "According to the ecological system theory, development occurs in the interaction of individuals and groups within and across settings throughout the life course, i.e., between an active human being and the changing properties of the immediate settings in which the developing individual lives" (Dodor, Sira & Hausafus, 2010, p. 2). Further study of the context, ecology, of the system(s) in which singletons work could help to illuminate these findings. Drawing from their findings, Sindberg and Lipscomb (2005) concluded that the only way to *understand* teacher isolation is through the "stories of those who teach" (p. 19).

Study 4 Sindberg (2014) Music Teacher Isolation Urban Setting

Sindberg (2014), building upon her previous work, Sindberg & Lipcomb (2005), conducted a "phenomenological study of the lived experiences of professional isolation and connectedness among music teachers in one urban district" (p. 7). This qualitative approach addressed the question of "How do (urban) public school music teachers perceive and describe their experience of professional isolation and connectedness?" (p.8). She described the challenging working conditions found in urban districts such as "high poverty, student mobility,

poor attendance, high dropout rates, limited English proficiency, limited resources and crowding (Gordon 2003; Kozol 2005; Lippman, Burns, and McArthur 1996; Payne 2005)" (p. 388). Additionally, she described how music teachers are often required to work part-time appointments rather than full time due to fewer course offerings related to factors such as funding and priority of other disciplines that fulfill state mandates.

Sindberg defined isolation "…as a persistent working condition (DuFour 1999; Mawhinney 2008; Pomson 2005; Rogers and Babinski 2002; Schlichte, Yssel, and Merbler 2005)" and "an unwelcome feeling of aloneness – physical or psychological – in the school setting (Lortie, 1975)" (p. 389). Ultimately, she claimed that the voice of urban music teachers is "unheard" and that few studies have documented the "paradox of isolation and conversation, and the ways in which they (urban music teachers) navigate these pathways and seek to provide meaningful musical experience to their students" (Sindberg, 2014, p. 390). For that reason, the purpose of the study was to "examine professional isolation, conversation and interaction from the perspective of public-school music teachers working in urban schools" (p. 390). Her three guiding research questions were: what does isolation look like and in what ways does it impact the work of the teacher in an urban setting? What collaborative models are available to facilitate meaningful interactions among music teachers in urban schools? In what ways does experience help teachers overcome barriers and navigate the emotional geographies of their work?

This collective case study employed the following data collection methods, open-ended interviews, follow-up emails, and author reflections. Interviews were transcribed for analysis and purposeful sampling was used to select the study participants. Thirteen secondary principals in a Midwest City School District were invited to participate in the study; of those, three schools agreed to participate: one middle school and two high schools. Seven veteran music teachers

from these districts volunteered to be informants in the study. Data collection included one interview with some teachers being interviewed a second time depending upon their availability. The open-ended interviews were from 25 to 45 minutes long. Each participant was invited to do a member check of his or her interview transcript(s). Follow-up emails were sent to teachers when clarification was needed. Additionally, reflective notes and memos were composed after interviews. Using constant comparative analysis (Hewitt-Tylor, 2001) the transcripts were sorted and coded. Triangulation, member checks, and verification of themes by an outside reader were used to ensure trustworthiness of the data collection and analysis. Sindberg uses situational generalizability (Schwartz, 1996) to interpret and transfer findings "as appropriate" to all teachers in urban schools, claiming findings could be interpreted by readers as generalizable to music teachers in other urban schools.

The findings were as follows: recollections of time when participants felt isolated in their profession were "intensely personal". Teachers expressed frustration and judgement from their content peers in other districts when their students' low ratings at competitive events did not demonstrate the growth they had made. The disconnection from content peers generated feelings of isolation. Some even indicated feelings of failure and desire to quit. Some described the disconnection between what they wanted the students to be able to do and the realities of their teaching situation. Others described the process of becoming "culturally literate" in their teaching community, getting to know community members and local culture. Additional challenges include differences in languages and vowel formation, transiency of the population, higher number of special education students, and higher number of students with educational and behavioral needs. Sindberg reported that despite the challenges, these teachers demonstrated a passion and commitment to teaching in urban districts including in her findings statements about

participants' love for urban living and culture, and desire to make a difference in the lives of their students.

One obstacle coded as "mobility" referred to the way music teachers are moved around within a district, some working more than one appointment to create a full-time teaching placement. This circumstance added to teacher feelings of isolation and worry that the teaching position would be changed or cut with each coming year. Mobility made it difficult for teachers to get to know their colleagues. Participants described their value for collegial relationships with some making distinct efforts to interact with their building colleagues. Each of the teachers participated in a music PLC and described the value of this time with content sharing colleagues citing collaborations and professional and personal support.

In her discussion, Sindberg described the paradoxical nature of isolation stating, "Some teachers choose to isolate themselves to create respite from the noise of teaching or to bear down on their own classroom; other teachers crave adult-adult interaction" (p. 398). She reported that, "Each teacher who participated in this study echoed the importance of conversation and collaboration described in the literature (Colbert and Wolff, 1992; Lieberman and Miller 2008; Mawhinney, 2008; Rogers and Babinski, 2002)" (p.398). This combined with the teachers' descriptions of their commitment to the community and learners enforced the need for such interactions to offset the isolation one might feel due to the unique challenges of being a music teacher in an urban setting.

Sindberg warns that since the number of participants in this study was limited by principals' willingness to allow their teachers to participate, the findings are incomplete. Sindberg called for further study of music teachers in urban districts to understand better their experiences in relation to isolation, conversation, and collaboration. Additionally, she

recommended examining isolation in other settings such as in rural communities where teachers are separated geographically and represent a population also "often neglected in research".

Advantages and Limitations of Study 4

As identified by Sindberg, a major limitation of this study concerned the access to the population of the study. This raises an interesting question regarding the power structure of educational systems. What were the reasons principals had for not allowing their teachers to participate in the study? Another related, limitation was the number of interviews conducted with each participant. Perhaps if Sindberg had been able to schedule multiple interviews, as did Hagin (2020), she would have been able to get a more complete account of the lived experiences of her subjects. Determining an appropriate number of participants for a successful study can be a complex consideration (Kim, 2016) and core concern (Johnson & Rowlands, 2012) for qualitative researchers. Beitlin (2012) suggests that an appropriate sample size is 6 to 12 participants "provided there is thematic redundancy after 6 interviews" (p. 244). Kvale (1996) suggests 15 interviews plus or minus 10 depending upon time and resources. Kvale (1996) recommends quality over quantity, suggesting at least three rounds of open, life-story interviews. O'Reilly and Parker (2012) value the appropriateness of the data over the sample size, depth over breadth, and relevancy to one's research purpose and questions. Saturation, according to Guest, Bunce, and Johnson (2006) is the "gold standard" in health science research. In qualitative research, saturation is reached when data no longer reveals new knowledge or reveals redundant knowledge and when the participants have shared all they want to share (Kim, 2016; Ortega, 2013).

O'Reilly and Parker (2012) recommend that researchers be transparent about their epistemological and methodological positions to guide and justify their decision-making process.

Sindberg acknowledged the significance of her sample size in her limitations stating that her findings are therefore incomplete. O'Reilly and Parker (2012) note that incomplete findings are not necessarily invalid; rather that the "phenomenon has not been fully explored" (p. 194). One could question if Sindberg could have adjusted her methodological approach to solicit more participants. It is unknown if her protocols required that she only solicit participants from one urban district. If not, expanding her participant search to include other urban districts or using methods such as snowball sampling could have facilitated access to more potential participants. Snow-ball sampling enlists existing participants to recommend other potential participants for a study (Bogdan & Bilken, 2007).

Although the findings in this study were incomplete, Sindberg brought attention to the needs of an underserved population of educators in a high needs' community. Several characteristics of the phenomenon of teaching music in an urban setting were revealed and support the need for further study of singleton educators across communities. By choosing a phenomenological approach to this study, Sindberg explored potential root causes of feelings of music teacher isolation.

Study 5 Taylor (2018) Visual Arts Singletons

Taylor (2018) conducted a phenomenological study of visual art teachers in Los Angeles County, California. Taylor cited a lack of empirical literature on effective implementation of supports for beginning visual arts teachers (VATs) nationally and no existing support system for VATs in California, particularly Los Angeles County as justification for her study. Taylor used qualitative methods to elicit feedback from first- and second-year VATs to inform the development of a regional model for an arts support community (CoP). Taylor referenced changes in art credentials and California State standards for the arts as catalysts for the

implementation of an arts support community for beginning art teachers. Hanawalt (2015, 2016) study revealed inadequacies in support networks to meet the needs of novice art educators. This revelation and Taylor's experience as a former public school art educator and collage pre-service art education instructor prompted her to collaborate with the associate education director of school and teacher programs at a local museum to create a learning community (CoP) for VATs. The three-year program offered shared learning in visual arts pedagogy and artistic practices. To build upon the existing art CoP and create a model of professional development and support for beginning VATs Tyler referenced the Exploratorium's Teacher Induction Program (TIP) for beginning science teachers. Taylor (2018) posed the following questions "(a) why such a community or program doesn't already exist for beginning VATs in one of the largest arts concentrated regions in the United States; (b) what it might look like for VATs, particularly the mentoring aspect; and (c) how such a CoP might address the competency needs and concerns of VATs (both veteran and novice), including helping them overcome feelings of professional isolation" (p. 14). The primary research question was "How might a professional support community be designed specifically to meet the needs of beginning visual art teachers in Los Angeles County?" (p. 18). Taylor's two supporting questions were, what are some of the existing supports currently being used by beginning VATs in PK-12 public schools within Los Angeles County? How might the lived experiences of beginning VATs in Los Angeles County impact the values (immediate, potential, and applied) that they anticipate gaining from participating in the proposed VAT CoP, based on the Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner (2017a) value-creation framework for social learning? B. Wenger-Trayner, E. Wenger-Trayner, Cameron, Eryigit-Madzwamuse, and Hart (2017) describe social learning as:

What people do in their practices, what they try and whether it works or not, all contains

information that is a potential resource for someone else. Through participation in

learning interactions, they gain new insights and resources that lead them to change their

practice, with, one hopes, improved results. This may even transform them or their

environment. Learning comes full circle when they feedback these effects into their

communities. It is these loops between learning interactions, insights, practice, results,

and back that we call social learning (p.3).

Wenger-Trayner, et al. (2017) define value as "importance, worth, or usefulness rather

than moral standards, even if the two are related" (p.3). Wenger-Trayner and Wegner-Trayner's

(2017a) Value Creation Framework is an evaluation template that tracks interventions in a

"social context where impact depends on the value that relevant actors find in the intervention"

(p.4). Tayler, with the intent to collect qualitative data to inform the designing/re-designing of a

professional support CoP for beginning VATs, enlisted the Value Creation Framework to guide

her inquiry of VATs' individual and collective competency needs and concerns. Qualitative

methods in the form of semi-structured interviews were used to elicit thick, rich descriptions of

participants' lived experiences (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Creswell 2014). The theoretical

framework for the study was rooted in situated learning and a framework for Communities of

Practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger et al., 2002; Wenger, 1998). Lave and Wenger (1991)

argue that communities of practice are everywhere and that individuals are generally involved in

many of them. Through the social participation in these communities, one learns. Communities

of practice require more than skills and technical knowledge; they build relationships over time

(Lave and Wenger 1991: 98) and gather communities around things that matter to people

(Wenger 1998). Lave and Wenger (1991) claim that "the mastery of knowledge and skill

requires newcomers to move toward full participation in the socio-cultural practices of a community" (p. 29). Situated learning and Lave and Wenger's (1991/2008) "legitimate peripheral participation" provides a theoretical lens for understanding how newcomers become part of a community of practice.

This Los Angeles County study solicited participants from the 80 individual schools within the county border targeting 5-10 credentialed beginning visual art teachers in their first- or second-year teaching PK-12 grade. Purposeful snowball sampling (Bernard et al. 2017) and questionnaires were used to solicit five participants who met the study criteria. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with each of the participants, recorded, and coded. Additionally, field notes were taken to supplement the recorded data. Six questions were included in the interview protocol along with neutral prompts to elicit elaborated responses from participants as necessary. Questions were generated based upon the topic categories identified in Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner (2017b) value-creation framework, modified to reflect the guiding research question(s) and peer-reviewed by content experts. Participants were provided examples of the proposed CoP design one week prior to the interview to reference during the interview. Taylor used an inductive process code responses and interrater to ensure accuracy regarding codes and themes (Bernard et al., 2017). Triangulation was not available for this study since only one interview was conducted with each participant. Additionally, member checks were not conducted due to the limited availability of participants for follow-up meetings. Data analysis was peer-reviewed by content experts to ensure validity in interpretation and understanding of participants' responses (Taylor, 2018).

Taylor reported responses for the question, how might a professional support community be designed specifically to meet the needs of beginning visual art teachers in Los Angeles

County, revealed three themes. Participants indicated they would like the VAT CoP to provide

support from and collaboration with other VATs, ongoing professional development, and better

advocacy and support from administration. For the question, what are some of the existing

supports currently used by beginning VATs in PK-12 public schools within Los Angeles County,

three findings emerged. Participants indicated the following existing supports, from art teacher

colleagues, professional organizations, and a lack of administrative support. Participants also

reported, according to the value-based framework, that the immediate value of a VATs CoP

would be collaboration with other VATs and empathy/comfort from shared beginning VAT

experiences. Another potential value would be ongoing professional growth, and an applied

value would be making curriculum better/more accessible. Taylor concluded that the data from

this study implies that the proposed visual art professional support community could potentially

resolve some of the issues (needs) reported by the VATs in Los Angeles County.

Advantages and Limitations of Study 5

Taylor identified that a limitation of her study was the small number of participants. She

also identified that the participants were female, and a diverse group of participants might yield

additional information and perspectives. Taylor did not identify other limitations of this study.

Qualitative research is contextual and naturalistic requiring the researcher to collect rich

descriptive data to gain understanding of the phenomenon they are studying (Bogdan & Biklen,

2007). As mentioned previously the qualitative researcher's data collection is complete once data

no longer reveals new knowledge or reveals redundant knowledge and when the participants

have shared all they want to share (Kim, 2016; Ortega, 2013). Due to the limited number of

participants and by conducting only one interview with each participant, Taylor did not meet the

rigorous standard of qualitative research. The elicitation of "thick, rich descriptions from

participants" described in her methodology is not achieved due to the limitations of her methods and data collection protocols. The interview questions, although somewhat open-ended, do not prompt rich, detailed responses. For example, prompt one, tell me about the kinds of support you have as a beginning VAT does not encourage the participant to describe their broader lived experience. Important information such as what was their previous experience with the field of art education, did they know other educators in the district prior to working there, is the school climate welcoming for beginning teachers, etc. would add depth and richness to Taylor's understanding of the participant's experience and needs. Additionally, three of the five questions elicited direct responses to the VAT CoP proposal. Bogdan and Biklen (2007) caution the qualitative researcher that they are not "putting together a puzzle whose picture you already know" (p. 6). Rather than ask, what might make participating in this CoP meaningful or useful, one might ask, if you were to design a professional development community for yourself (and colleagues) what characteristics would make this community meaningful/useful/accessible? Taylor, in this study, had a program model in mind and solicited feedback with the puzzle pieces already chosen or at least suggested. This raises questions of validity. Were the participants intimidated by the researcher's investment in the program model? Without additional interviews, the relationship between the interviewer and interviewee may not develop to the point of trust and candidness necessary for frank, honest, sharing of information. Interviewing in qualitative research requires building a relationship with the participant, knowing one another and putting the participant at ease (Whyte, 1984). In addition, member checks were not conducted to allow participants the opportunity to review the transcripts and coding to add clarification/elaboration and validate the research findings. Taylor does not address these limitations, nor does she present a strong conceptual framework for her study. Although she identified situated learning and

Communities of Practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger et al., 2002, Wenger, 1998) as a

framework, it is unclear how this framework guides the data collection and analysis. The

information gathered from this study did, as noted by Taylor, align with the existing literature

indicating the necessity for support for beginning visual art teachers (Garvis & Pendergast, 2010;

Hanawalt, 2015, 2016) and new teachers in general who feel isolated (Johnson, 1990; Johnson &

Birkeland, 2003; Lorte, 1975; Rogers & Bubinski, 1999; Stansbury & Zimmerman, 2000).

Ingersoll and Strong (2011) report that "Several studies have calculated that between 40% and

50% of new teachers leave within the first 5 years of entry into teaching (e.g., Grissmer & Kirby,

1987, 1992, 1997; Hafner & Owings, 1991; Ingersoll, 2003; Murnane, Singer, Willett, Kemple,

& Olsen, 1991)" (p. 2). This statistic indicates the necessity of a supportive professional network

for beginning teachers, especially singletons who do not have access to content peers.

Understanding the Phenomenon of the Singleton Educator

Sindberg and Lipscomb (2005) suggest that the only way to understand teacher isolation

is through the "stories of those who teach" (p. 19). There is limited research available

specifically addressing the experience and circumstance(s) of the singleton teacher (Cutts et al.

2017; Dodor & Hausafus, 2010; Ferriter et al., 2013; Hagin, 2020; Hansen, 2015; Sindberg,

2011; Sindberg & Lipscomb 2005; Wilson et al., 2015). More research attention has been

focused on teacher isolation in general education (Sindberg, 2011; Bakkeness, de Brabander, &

Imants, 1999; Calabrese, 1986; DuFour, 1999; Flinders, 1988; Lortie, 1975; Schlichte, Yssel, &

Merbler, 2005; Thompson & Hamilton, 1991; Zielinski & Hoy, 1983). However, there are

characteristics of the phenomenon of singleton teachers that are unique to their individual

situation(s) that warrant investigation. Singleton teachers, in addition to the more studied reasons

"general education" teachers are isolated, are isolated because of the specialization of the subject

they teach (Scheib, 2006; Sindberg, 2011). Hansen and Wood (2015), in their discussion of the professional development needs of singletons, identify that the specialized nature of the subjects they teach is directly linked to their professional and personal isolation. Circumstances such as the compartmentalized structure of schools (Calabrese, 1986; Cookson, 2005; Flinders, 1988; Gaikwood & Brantly, 1992; Lortie, 1975; Robert 1973; Scheib, 2006), scheduling (Lieberman & Miller, 1992; Lortie, 1975: Sindberg & Lipscomb, 2005; Scheib, 2006), feelings of collegial (Barley & Brigham, 2008; Dos Santos 2019; LaGarry & Richard, 2018; McDonough, Gildersleeve, & Jarsky, 2010; McHenry-Sorber, et al. 2019; Weiner, 2006) and professional (Burtan, Brown & Johnson, 2013) isolation, loneliness (Neito, 2003; Sindberg, 2011), feelings of disrespect (Gordon, 2000; Hamann & Gordon, 2000; Scheib, 2003; Sindberg, 2011), and unique professional responsibilities (LaGarry & Richards, 2018; Scheib, 2006) add to feelings of isolation among singleton teachers.

Scheduling for special area subjects often conflicts with potential common planning times with like subject colleagues. Common planning times for general education teachers, departments, or grade level teams, are not typically planned to coincide with those of special area teachers. This scheduling structure further isolates the special area teacher by not allowing him/her to be included in these collegial groups. Potentially sending two messages, one, the inclusion of special area teachers' expertise is not perceived as relevant to general education planning and discourse, and two, special area teachers are not equally valued as part of the greater school community. One singleton teacher respondent in Sindberg and Lipscomb's (2005) study described being treated "like a babysitter". Others described frustration with the lack of understanding their colleagues had for "the work they do". Such factors, school policy and culture (Goddard, 2000), can negatively affect teachers if the climate is not one of value and

support for their discipline (Gordon, 2000; Hamann & Gordon, 2000; Scheib, 2003). Scheib

states, "The specialized nature of their subject area, lack of a supportive network within the

school building, geographical layout of many schools, scheduling of classes, and commitment to

working with students before and after school may predispose arts teachers to more feelings of

alienation than other subject-area teachers" (2006, pp.8-9). Scheib (2006) also reported that arts

teachers express more feelings of isolation than other subject-area teachers do.

Lortie (1975) identified three types of isolation, structural isolation ("egg-crate"

isolation), psychological isolation (perception of isolation and interaction with colleagues), and

adaptive isolation (response to feeling of being overwhelmed by new/existing demands).

Dussault, Deaulelin, Royer, and Loiselle (1999) described professional isolation as "the

unpleasant experience that occurs when a person's network of social relations at work is deficient

in some important way, either quantitatively or qualitatively" (p.6). Professional isolation is

often referenced to explain the reason(s) for teachers' problems (Achilles & Gaines, 1991;

Flinders, 1988; Levine, 1989; Martin & McGrevin, 1990; Moran, 1990; Rosenholtz, 1985; Smith

& Scott; 1990). The phenomenon of singleton teachers predisposes these educators to all the

circumstances surrounding our current understanding of isolation. Singleton educators often find

themselves structurally isolated (Calabrese, 1986; Flinders, 1988; Gaikwood & Brantley, 1992;

Lorte, 1975; Robert 1973) from their colleagues due to the specialized nature of their content

areas (Scheib, 2006). Subjects in the studies previously reported identified experiences of

psychological isolation citing feelings of being un-respected and undervalued in their teaching

environments. A lack of inclusion in team meetings and peer understanding of their content

specialties are identified as factors in this alienation. Additionally, some singletons expressed

feelings of being overwhelmed by the demands of their workload. Whether they were a new

teacher or veteran teacher teaching a new curriculum, professional demands influenced teacher

participation in professional development and peer interaction. Singletons are particularly

impacted by curricular demands because they lack the support of a specialist colleague in the

building or district for mentorship and/or collaboration. Professional isolation is a distinct

characteristic of the singleton phenomenon. Many studies identify that isolation in teaching leads

to feelings of extreme helplessness and burnout (Carlson & Thomas, 2006; Gaikwad & Brantley,

1992; Gordon, 2000; Hamann, 1990; Kilgore & Griffin 1998; Krueger, 2000; Neveu, 2007;

Rosenberg, O'Shea & O'Shea 1998; Scheib, 2006) and attrition (Gordon, 2000; Hamann, 1990;

Krueger, 2000; Scheib, 2006). Darling-Hammond (2003) stated that schools pay a heavy cost

due to teacher attrition. Dufour (1999) noted that teacher isolation "prohibits schools from

functioning as professional learning communities" (p.3). Parker Palmer identified a universal

need for community and notes that where one person feels isolated due to their values it is likely

others also feel that way (in Daugherty, 1998). As noted in Sindberg's (2014) study of urban

music educators, love of students and community was what kept the teachers teaching, even in

demanding working conditions. Nieto (2003) notes, that for many, teaching is "more than a job".

Professional development initiatives such as collaborative learning communities (Drago-

Severson & Pinto, 2006; Thompson & Hamilton, 1991), mentorship programs (Heider, 2005;

Rogers & Bubinski, 1999; Schlichte, Yssel, & Merbler 2005), professional circles (Mycue,

2001), electronic communication systems (Thompson & Hamilton 1991), communities of

practice (Wenger 1998), critical friends groups (Curry, 2008), peer coaching (Ackland, 1991;

Dalton & Moyer, 1991; Foulger, 2005; Kohler, Crilley, Shearer, & Good, 1997; Miller, Harris, &

Watanabe, 1991; Robin, 1995), teacher study groups (Pfaff, 2000; Clair, 1998), and professional

learning communities (DuFour & Eaker 1998; DuFour, Eaker, & DuFour, 2005; Hord, 2003) are

all collaborative structures that could help to alleviate teacher isolation in schools. The question becomes, how do these structures support the needs of singleton educators?

Singletons, School Reform Efforts and Professional Development

Recent trends in education reform have turned to professional development and teacher leadership to improve our public education system(s). Legislation such as "No Child Left Behind" and "Race to the Top" stress the importance of student outcomes and the relationship between student success and teacher/principal effectiveness. As stated earlier, the 2015 Every Student Succeeds Act *(*ESSA) mandated that districts provide teachers professional development (PD) to improve their content and pedagogical knowledge as part of the criteria to receive federal funding. Districts must provide teachers personalized, ongoing, and job-embedded PD opportunities that are data driven, collaborative, regularly evaluated and part of the school's improvement plan (Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development [ASCD], 2015; USDOE, 2015). Additionally, the revised language of ESSA includes the arts and music in its definition of a "well-rounded" education removing the term "core curriculum" used in the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) from all subjects. In 2014, the National Coalition for Core Arts Standards (NCCAS) release the National Core Arts Standards (NCAS). Since then, twenty-seven states and the Department of Defense have adopted revised arts standards in one or more of the arts disciplines. In 2017, the New York State Education Department (NYSED) released the 2017 New York State P-12 Learning Standards for the Arts designed to "develop artistically literate citizens". NYSED defines an artistically literate citizen as a citizen who "…has the knowledge, skills, and understanding to actively engage in the arts throughout their lives. The intrinsic nature of the arts leads to and promotes a civilized, sustainable society. Artistically literate graduates are career and college ready, capable of understanding and

addressing the needs of society, and participating in a global economy" (NYSED, 2017). Full implementation of the revised NYS Arts Standards was projected for the 2021-22 school year putting additional pressure on districts to provide professional development support for their arts educators.

Changing learning standard requirements across disciplines and accountability requirements have prompted a reenergized movement in collaborative professional development initiatives, such as Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) (DuFour & Eaker 1998; DuFour, Eaker, & DuFour 2005, Hord, 2003), to help districts (re)structure their approach to teacher professional development and effective teacher leadership. According to Darling-Hammond (2003), "Substantial evidence suggests that, among all school resources, good teachers are the most important determinant of student achievement" (p. 7).

Katzenmeyer & Moller (2016) state that "Research on the impact of the accountability movement (Darling-Hammond & Prince, 2007; Wechsler, Tiffany-Morales, Campbell, Humphrey, Kim, & Shields, 2007) has helped us understand that investing in teachers and their learning, rather than creating more tests, is a better investment for improving student outcomes" (p. 121). Ideally, the concept of communities of professional development within the public school's system(s) as a means for collegiality and improved teacher effectiveness has the potential to be a universal approach to meeting educators' professional development needs. This raises the question of where singletons fit in this reform effort, and how can this "new" focus on professional learning communities meet singleton's professional development needs and positively affect the circumstances and conditions experienced by these lone educators.

Aaron Hansen, a noted author, presenter, and consultant on the topic of transformation of schools addresses the challenges of creating Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) for

singletons and small schools. Hansen, credited with the transformation of Nevada's White Pine Middle School into a nationally recognized, high achieving school, describes the challenges administrators face when forming professional learning communities in their small schools. Where do singletons fit into this initiative to foster collegiality and best practices by bringing common content educators together in district PLCs? What about the special area, singleton, teacher(s)? Hansen (2015) in his book, *How to Develop PLSs for Singletons and Small Schools*, recognized that many small schools are full of singletons. He cited the National Center for Education Statistics (2013) noting that 25.4 percent of schools nationally are rural and many of them are small. In small schools, grade-level or subject-specific teachers are singletons (Hansen, 2015). He addressed the question of "with whom do our singleton teachers collaborate, and what do they collaborate about?"

Hansen notes that singletons are either assigned to a PLC as an afterthought or left out entirely. Additionally, he recognized that the pressures of high stakes testing in certain subjects dominate the focus of PLCs in these areas. In many circumstances, singleton teachers are plugged into PLCs that do not support their teaching. "Inadvertently, they (administrators) marginalize singleton teachers and their importance to the school community by not being thoughtful about the roles singletons can play within this new collaborative" (Hansen, 2015, p. 2). Hansen provided five ways "teams can be organized to help singletons and small schools participate fully in the PLC process" (p. 3). They are through vertical teams, interdisciplinary teams, singletons who support, and structural change (Ferriter et al., 2013; Fulton & Britton, 2011; Venables, 2011).

Before exploring Hansen's options for singleton participation in PLCs, it is important to (re)define the objectives of a PLC. Guskey (2003), in an extensive analysis of successful PLCs,

identified the following five common characteristics to be most frequently associated with success: 1) enhanced teachers' content knowledge and pedagogical knowledge, 2) provision of sufficient time and other resources, 3) promotion of collegiality and collaboration, 4) inclusion of procedures for evaluation, and 5) alignment with other reform initiatives. All Things PLC defines a professional learning community as "An ongoing process in which educators work collaboratively in recurring cycles of collective inquiry and action research to achieve better results for the students they serve. Professional learning communities operate under the assumption that the key to improved learning for students is continuous job-imbedded learning for educators" (All Things PLC, https://www.allthingsplc.info/about). The emphasis here is the shift in school focus from students being taught to student learning. "Whereas many schools operate as if their primary purpose is to ensure that children are taught, PLCs are dedicated to the idea that their organization exists to ensure that all students learn essential knowledge, skills, and dispositions" (All Things PLC; DuFour 2004, 2007; DuFour, DuFour, Eaker, & Many, 2006). DuFour (2004) highlighted three big ideas, or core principles, that PLCs operate under, 1) the PLC focus is on students' learning, 2) the PLC operates as a collaborative culture, and 3) effectiveness of the PLC is based on results.

With this definition of PLCs in mind, one can better understand Hansen's five ways PLC teams can be organized to include singletons. Keeping in mind that Schmoker (2004) warned that, "mere collegiality won't cut it". The first option for including singletons in PLCs is vertical teams, a group of teachers who teach a common subject but at different grade levels (Hansen, 2015). Hansen described a scenario in a district with only one grade level teacher in each grade. Grade level educators came together as a PLC to define essential standards and learning targets for each grade. They then explored what constituted common assessment criteria that could span

all grades. They focused the discussion on what common skill(s) students needed to learn that transitioned from grade level to grade level in a singular domain, such as language arts. This spiraling curriculum technique based on cognitive theory (Bruner, 1960) is common to curriculum planning across grade levels. Hansen argued that this same approach could be used at the high school level in vertical content teams, for example, by establishing common assessments rubrics for long-term learning of essential skills in science. DuFour (2011) described a scenario where vertical band teachers create SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-based) goals for performance and collaborate on ways to improve outcomes at their given level. Some of the challenges of the vertical team model are the differences in expected student performance levels, the limitations of professional development for advanced level teachers, the reality that some singleton teachers do not have a vertical counterpart, and that teachers at different grade levels do not always share a common schedule that allows for collaboration.

The next model, interdisciplinary teams, groups teachers from different content areas. These teachers work together to develop common assessments around a universal essential skill (Hansen, 2015). Hansen claimed that by focusing on a skill, teachers can collaborate towards students learning "despite vast differences in their content discipline" (2015, p. 19). In these PLC teams, teachers are directed to identify a common skill across disciplines. Hansen provides the example of a school to career program where the collaborative teams consisted of specialist in various industries. Like industries were grouped together and although the curricula were vastly different in most cases, the teams identified a "common denominator" in the topic of employability skills, such as filling out a job application, resume writing, etc. This model also

has limitations. The professional development of the participants was confined to shared skills across disciplines and did not support content specific professional development.

Another example of interdisciplinary teaming could be a high school social studies or science team. Although the general content area is the same, social studies, science, etc., the course foci are different, world history, government, biology, physics, etc. The focus is on common skills, not common content. This same method can also be applied across grade levels. For example, PLCs that include both band and choral teachers could focus on sight-reading, and visual art teachers (drawing, painting, photography, etc.) could focus on knowledge and application of art elements as a common assessment. The shortcoming of this model is it does not allow the teachers to focus on the content knowledge in their specific discipline within a domain, for example ceramics verses photography in visual arts or vocal verses instrumental music instruction. These teachers may not have content colleagues, knowledgeable others, to collaborate with. It can also be difficult for interdisciplinary teams to determine what they have in common. Additionally, organizing meeting times can pose a logistical challenge. When requiring singleton teachers to participate in interdisciplinary PLCs it is important to remember that singleton teachers, those who teach unique subjects, often identify that their colleagues lack an understanding of "what they do" (Sindberg, 2011).

The next model is singletons who support. Hansen stated, "When singletons support, they join a traditional team and support team goals, even when those goals have nothing to do with singleton content" (p. 31). Hansen describes a PLC team where three singletons were grouped with two English teachers. The English teachers dominated the establishment of SMART goals and improving grammar was determined to be the PLCs' focus. Initially the English teachers had low expectations of the singletons in their group, but circumstances illuminated how grammar

could be taught through drama. Hansen stressed that when singletons support, they must accept a supportive role on the team. Additionally, "Singleton who support effectively often have to step completely outside of their content area, but they are willing to do so as part of a team focused on a common goal" (Hansen, 2015, p. 34). When singletons are selected (by administrators) to take on a supportive role in a team it works best if there is an obvious connection between the singleton's content area and that of the teams. Singletons can also be called upon to support by providing time for PLCs to meet. Often special area teachers' classes are schedule to provide common planning time for other "regular or core teachers." Hansen identified that this is not ideal but, "may be the only way schools can manage to provide time for teams to do this important work" (p. 38). One might question how serving in a supportive role is meeting the singleton's professional development needs or ensuring content learning for his/her students. How do the "singletons who support" examples meet the criteria identified by Guskey (2003) as being best practices for successful PLCs? How does this support a school culture of mutual respect among teachers? Hansen acknowledged that the "elective" courses some singleton teachers teach are often the "only reason some students come to school" (2015, p. 39). Yet, this acknowledgement does little to address the shortcomings of the role of singletons as supporter in PLCs and the impact this might have on peer perception of their content and professional value. Singletons identify lack of cross-content professional understanding and value as a source of professional isolation and alienation (Sindberg & Lipscomb, 2005; Sindberg, 2011; Eisner, 1992). Hansen identified the difficulty in holding singletons accountable for the success of the group (data collection) as a challenge because the common assessments are typically administered in the "core" classes. This realization creates yet another argument for the shortcoming of this approach. Additionally, he noted that the role of a supportive singleton could

be ambiguous and generate feelings of frustration, wasted time, and lack of value among these educators. Participation in PLCs as "singletons who support" has potential to increase singleton teacher isolation rather than meet the goals of effective professional learning communities as defined by DuFour (2004) and Guskey (2003).

Virtual teams are another model for PLCs. Technology can be used to bring together singletons across districts and between communities. This scenario described in some of the previously reviewed studies (Dodor & Hausafus, 2010; Hagin, 2020) allows singletons to connect with other content specialist using the PLC format virtually. Singleton teachers can create SMART goals that promote learning in their content area with other content specialists outside of their immediate school community. In addition, this model provides a network of support for domain specific pedagogical and content knowledge. Virtual PLCs are not "bound by location". Although this model requires an investment in time and planning to establish a PLC network, the opportunity to connect with other singleton teachers in one's content area can be a valuable resource. Virtual PLCs or Professional Learning Networks (PLN) help to connect educators who would otherwise be isolated from their content specialty peers. Some of the challenges are finding and organizing content peers, finding a common meeting time – often outside of school hours, navigating technology, accountability of members, and need for strong leadership. Hansen provides tips for establishing a PLC/PLN. One can reference Ferriter's (2011) blog "Electronic Teaming for Singletons in a PLC" for instruction in using Twitter to find content peers and contact professional development organizations to help connect with other educators in your area (Hansen, 2015). Other resources can be found at go.solution-tree.com/PLCbooks and referencing *Learning by Doing* (DuFour, DuFour, Eaker, & Many, 2010).

The last model for engaging singletons in PLCs is structural change. Hansen cautions that schools can have restrictive structures that promote isolation (Calabrese, 1986; Cookson 2005; Flinders, 1988; Gaikwood & Brantley, 1992; Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2016 Lortie, 1975; Robert, 1973, and others). By examining these traditional structures, systems can change context(s) to achieve the outcomes desired. Hansen suggests moving singleton classrooms closer to colleagues in the school and grouping departments so they can collaborate and easily access one another's classrooms. He stated, "In many schools, the structures are arranged in opposition to collaboration, and most people will not work in opposition to the structures." and "…keeping structures that promote isolation makes creating a collaborative culture extremely difficult" (p.59). Fullan (2005) identified that "…systems change individuals more often than individuals change the system" (p. 218 as cited in Hansen, 2015, p. 59). Other structural (systemic) changes could include scheduling (Lieberman & Miller, 1992; Lortie, 1975), school climate (Dussault, 1997; Rothberg, 1986; Solman & Feld 1989), relationships with colleagues, families and administrators (Beer & Beer, 1992; Boyle et al., 1995; Cooper, 1996; Tellenback et al., 1983; Travers & Whitehead & Ryba, 1995), and perceptions of professional recognition (Boyle et al., 1995; Tellenback et al., 1983, Travers & Cooper, 1996). Dussault et al. (1997) also referred to these "structures" as sources of teacher work stress and professional isolation. Identifying the structural characteristics that inhibit communication and collaboration among educators and restructuring school systems to promote rather than restrict collaboration and context for professional learning communities, can improve student learning and support for singleton as well as all educators.

Summary – Phenomenon of the Singleton Educator

This section of literature review has identified several characteristics of *singleton* teachers. They can be grade level teachers, "core" teachers, or content specialists (Ferriter, Graham, & Wight, 2013; Hansen, 2015; Richmond & Manokore, 2011). Singletons tend to be found in but are not limited to small systems (Ferriter et al. 2013, Hansen, 2015) and they may be a singleton in one content specialty, but not another, within a single teaching placement (Hagin, 2020).

Hagin (2020) reports that singletons, like all educators, "…need continuous training in content knowledge and pedagogical content knowledge to improve their learning and thus improve student learning (Loucks-Horsley, Stiles, Mundry, Love, & Hewson, (2010); Loughran, Berry, & Mulhall, 2012; Shulman, 1986)" (p. 158). Because singleton do not have onsite content peers, they must seek mentors and professional development outside of their teaching community. Lack of mentorship and interaction with content peers can lead to feelings of isolation and teacher attrition (Darling-Hammond, 2003; Heider, 2005; Heider, Hirsch, Koppich & Knapp, 2001) and a forced "self-reliant" mentality (Lortie, 1975) that can also result in feelings of isolation.

Another characteristic of singleton teachers is that their classrooms are often located in isolated areas within the school building. This "egg crate" (Lorte, 1992) structure of schools restricts teachers' access to one another discouraging professional and personal interactions (Calabrese, 1986; Flinders, 1988; Gaikwood & Brantley, 1992; Lortie, 1975; Robert, 1973; Sindberg & Lipscomb, 2005). Time (Anderson & Harris, 1997; Cookson, 2005; Dodor & Hausafus, 2010; Flinders1988; Gray, Mitchell, & Tarter, 2014; Guskey, 2003; Hansen, 2015; Lortie, 1975; Newman, 2019) and scheduling (Lieberman & Miller, 1992; Lortie, 1975) also limit singleton teacher interactions. Due to the specialized nature of their discipline and for

convenience, "special area" courses are often scheduled opposite "core" teachers' prep times (Sindberg, 2011; Taylor, 1885) further limiting opportunities for collegial interactions. Additionally, because singleton educators do not have content area peers for collaboration, they experience high demand of their time for research and preparation for their courses; often seeking outside professional development and resources to meet these needs (Cutts et al., 2017; Flinders, 1988; Sindberg, 2011).

Another phenomenon reported by singleton teachers was the lack of understanding and value for their discipline either expressed or implied by their colleagues. Singletons in the studies reviewed described feeling like "a babysitter" and noting that sometimes colleagues do not even know "the work they(I) do" (Sindberg & Lipscomb, 2005). Additionally, school policy and culture (Goddard, 2000), can negatively affect teachers if the climate is not one of value and support for their discipline (Gordon, 2000; Hamann & Gordon, 2000; Scheib, 2003). These examples demonstrate Lortie's three types of isolation, structural isolation, psychological isolation, and adaptive or responsive isolation (1975). Concluding that singleton educators are particularly vulnerable to feelings of isolation due to the characteristics and conditions of their circumstances.

Participants in the studies reviewed identified both advantages and disadvantages of teaching as a singleton. Some singletons embraced the challenge of seeking professional development and outside colleagues and resources. Others expressed a feeling of autonomy. They valued the professional freedom they had developing curriculum and teaching their singleton subject. Pearson and Moomaw (2005) explored the relationship between teacher autonomy and stress concluding that as curricular autonomy increased on-the-job stress decreased. However, they also reported that autonomy did not have the significant effect on job

satisfaction found in other previous studies (Perie & Baker, 1997). Additionally, they reported that factors such as academic ability, quality of prior training, and years of experience have not been identified as related to instances of autonomy (Pearson & Hall, 1993). The significance of these finding is that singleton teachers' unique circumstances may produce different results when exploring the relationship between autonomy and stress/burnout, job satisfaction, motivation, professionalism, and empowerment; all constructs that have demonstrated to be linked to autonomy (Brunetti, 2001; Kim & Loadman, 1994; Klecker & Loadman, 1996; Pearson and Moomaw, 2005; Ulrikson, 1996). "Curriculum autonomy is also logically consistent with the examination of educational reform initiatives (Melenyzer, 1990; Short, 1994); especially because many argue that the autonomy of teachers, one dimension of empowerment (Klecker & Loadman, 1996; Short & Rinehart 1992); is critical to any initiative's implementation and success (Ingersoll, 1997)" (Pearson and Moomaw, 2005, p. 49). This relationship is important when considering how singleton educators and the subjects they teach fit into the call for education reform and implementation of Professional Learning Communities (PLCs). A topic that will be revisited later in this review.

Some study participants expressed feeling overwhelmed by the isolation and challenge of being a singleton educator. Sindberg and Lipscomb's (2005) study identified the existence of feelings of isolation among music educators due to location and subject area. Additionally, they identified instances of professional isolation negatively affecting their teaching. All the studies reviewed identified instances of isolation, structural and systemic challenges, and participants' need for professional development and collegial interaction (Cutts et al., 2017; Dodor & Hausafus, 2010; Hagin, 2020; Sindberg, 2011; Sindberg & Lipscomb, 2005). There is limited research available specifically addressing the experience and circumstance(s) of the singleton

teacher (Cutts et al. 2017; Dodor & Hausafus, 2010; Ferriter et al., 2013; Hagin, 2020; Hansen, 2015; Sindberg, 2011; Sindberg & Lipscomb 2005; Wilson et al., 2015). Further research is necessary to understand the phenomenon of the singleton educator and the unique circumstances affect their teaching and student learning. Additionally, as efforts move forward incorporating PLCs as the national standard for professional development and education reform, understanding how singleton educators fit into this reform effort is essential to its success.

Hansen (2015) acknowledged that singleton educators are often left out or placed in PLCs as an administrative afterthought. This approach is problematic and adversely affects community and team building, singleton teacher professional development, and teacher mindset (for both singletons and their colleagues). Hansen (2015) outlined five recommendations for administrators to help integrate singleton educators into PLCs: vertical teams, interdisciplinary teams, singletons who support, virtual teams, and structural change.

Although these recommendations attempt to provide options for including singletons in district PLCs, they do not necessarily meet the criteria for effective professional development for all educators and facilitation of student learning in singleton subjects. This raises a question of relevance when exploring singleton participation in PLCs as an "after thought" or "singleton who support(s)". Dufour (2004) identified six components for effective PLCs: focus on learning; collaborative culture that includes shared beliefs, values, and vision, and atmosphere of trust and respect; collective inquiry into best practices; action orientation; commitment to continuous improvement; and results orientation. To reach these objectives a more studied look at the "integration" of singletons into existing PLCs is required.

Hansen (2015) suggested that PLCs organized as vertical teams are one place to incorporate singleton educators. This model has merits in that it allows educators across grade

levels to share in discussions and implementations of best practices within their content area. Understanding the vertical alignment and progression of skills and content knowledge of students are valuable information as educators design and implement curriculum. However, this model does not ensure that all educators and their students benefit from this community. Singleton teachers who teach specialty courses may not fit into a vertical progression of skills that is particularly relevant to their professional development or their students' learning needs. Hansen acknowledged that advanced course educators in a particular vertical team do not equally benefit from the content discussions. These educators, often singletons, do not have the benefit of peer mentorship or collegial discussions with educators who share their expertise or content focus. Additionally, interdisciplinary teams, although they do have merit, also do not provide singletons with interactions with educators who share their discipline. Interdisciplinary teams, ideally, can foster value and appreciation across disciplines if implemented with the understanding that each participating educator has a significant role to play in student learning across content areas. This unfortunately is not always the case, and even the examples that Hansen provided of interdisciplinary PLCs indicated that the "core" educators often control the focus of the learning initiatives.

Teacher participation in PLCs as "singletons who support" and the examples provided go against the key components of PLCs as defined by DuFour (2004). This model does not foster a culture of respect for singleton educators or for the students who participate in their courses. In this model, there is flagrant disregard for the professional qualifications and value of singleton educators – particularly those teaching specialty courses. It could be argued that such an arrangement further erodes the relationship between these educators and their teaching environment, colleagues, and fosters feelings isolation and lack of value. In terms of professional

growth, this model does not provide opportunity for growth in content knowledge or pedagogy as it applies to the singleton's discipline and classroom practice.

Advancement of content knowledge and pedagogy are identified as requirements for successful professional development. New York State Professional Development Standards state that "Effective professional development fosters a culture of continuous improvement for all engaged in the learning endeavor. Practices address the needs of professionals throughout their careers and embrace other stakeholders as participants in learning. Activities are evaluated both for effectiveness and impact on student learning" (http://www.highered.nysed.gov/). This brings into question the merit of PLCs that do not connect singleton educators with other educators who share their content focus. This does not suggest that PLCs organized as vertical teams or interdisciplinary teams do not benefit the participating educators and their students. It suggests that these models do not replace the need for PLCs that bring educators together with other professionals in their field of expertise, especially for singleton educators isolated from content peers within their teaching environment. Further, it highlights the inappropriateness of using lone educators as "singletons who support" as a replacement for rigorous, meaningful, experiences in Professional Learning Communities. Battersby & Verdi (2015) state that "PLCs offer an infrastructure to create the supportive cultures and conditions necessary for achieving significant gains in teaching and learning and for assisting teachers to become more effective in their work with students (Morrissey 2000, 3)" (p.23).

Finally, Hansen (2015) offered virtual teams and structural change as potential strategies for promoting the development of PLCs. Structural change refers to physical and systemic changes that can lead to behavioral changes in a school community. Hansen argued that structures in schools can be arranged in opposition to collaboration, i.e., the "egg crate" school

structure previously described (Cookson, 2005; Lortie, 1975) that isolates teachers from interactions from one another. He also admitted that structural changes, whether they be physical or systemic, are difficult to implement and must be "intentionally designed around the behaviors (we) desire" (Hansen, 2015, p. 60). Additionally, he stated that "If we want to guide teachers out of isolation and into collaborating about common goals and assessment results, we must at least examine the existing structures" (p. 59). Examination of the structures associated with the phenomenon of singleton educators should also be included in this process of "guiding" teachers away from isolation and into meaningful collaboration(s) in the form of PLCs.

Hansen's (2015) description of virtual teams for singleton educators focuses primarily on small school structures where grade level teachers are singletons. He describes scenarios of "multi-school collaborative teams" of singleton content educators who work together to function as a PLC. Although the logistics of such collaborations requires extensive discussion, cooperation, and planning, with communication technology virtual communities can be created and ultimately successful. A new body of research has emerged exploring virtual PLCs. Hagin (2020) reports that "By using technology, singleton teachers can collaborate with others through a virtual platform regardless of their geographical location (Ferriter et al., 2013; Fulton & Britton, 2011; Hansen, 2015; McConnell, Parker & Eberhardt et al., 2013)" (p. 44). Exploration of PLCs that use a virtual format can provide models for singleton Virtual Professional Learning Communities (VPLCs) and provide collegial interaction and professional development for these lone educators. There is a growing body of literature exploring electronic formats for virtual PLCs, highlighting singleton educators. In Cutts et al (2017) study of a Professional Learning Network for Computer Science (CS) educators, singleton educators were brought together electronically for professional development learning and lesson implementation. This model,

providing teacher professional development in and implementation of the newly mandated CS curriculum, illuminates the potential for virtual PLCs. Although this initial study reported challenges experienced in its implementation, the structure of the program design offers a launching point for other such VPLCs directed toward providing a platform for content specific professional development and learning for singleton educators and their students. Virtual PLCs and off-site Professional Learning Communities that bring singletons together toward the common goal of exploring best practices and improving student learning can potentially improve the feelings of isolation reported by these educators. Additionally, school communities, teachers and students can benefit from the synergy between these educators and the fresh perspectives, resources, and practices they share.

Summary

The history of rural education identifies that rural communities are underrepresented in rural education research (Barley & Brighham, 2008; Billings, & Banks, 1993; Lavalley, Center for Public Education, 2018; Tice, Wilson, Floden, & Ferrini-Mundy, 2001) and policy decisions (Johnson, Mitchel, & Rotherham 2014; Pendall, Goodman, Zhu, & Gold, 2016). One in five children in the United States attend a rural school (Showalter, Hartman, Johnson, & Klein, 2019) and in thirteen U.S. states, one in three students are enrolled in rural districts (Johnson, Showalter, Klein, & Lester 2014; NCES, 2016). The urban normativity of the broader field of education (Biddle & Azano 2016; Biddle, Sutherland, & McHenry-Sorber 2019; Burdick-Will & Logan, 2017, Isserman, 2005; LaGarry, Lavalley, Johnson & Howley, 2015; Schafft, 2016; Sherwood, 2001; Thomas et. al. 2011) is well documented in the literature throughout U.S. history. Ever since 1909 when President Theodore Roosevelt tasked the U.S. Commission on Country Life to prepare a report on the condition of rural life in America and the labeling of rural

education as the "rural school problem" (Cubberley, 1912), rural communities have been described as "…what is left over after urban has been defined" (Farmer, 1997, p. 624).

Although one of the biggest challenges to rural education research is defining rural (Christiaens, 2015; Coburn, MacKinney, McBride, Mueller, Slifkin & Wakefield 2007; Coladarci, 2007; Cromartie & Bucholtz, 2008; Freeman & Randolph; Hart, Larson & Lishner, 2005; Hawley, Kozoil, Bovaird, McCormack, & Welch 2016; Howley, Theobald, & S.C. Howley, 2005; Moffa & McHenry-Sorber, 2018; Nespar, 2008; U.S. Census Bureau, 2010), scholars recommend that rich, contextual descriptions (Bosak &. Perlman, 1982; Coladarci, 2007; Ford, 1966; Jordan &. Hargrove, 1987; Shadish et al., 2002) that provide detailed information that delineates rural from other context (Hawley et al., 2016) can be an effective way to ensure validity in studies claimed as being rural.

Accountability measures such as No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, Annual Professional Performance Review (APPR, Chapter 103 of the Laws of 2010), and 2015 Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) have brought renewed attention to the necessity of providing professional development support to educators across all communities, and in all disciplines, including the arts. Singleton (Ferriter et al., 2013; Hansen, 2015; Venables, 2011) grade level or subject teachers are common in small or rural districts (Ferriter et al., 2013; Hansen, 2015; Richmond & Manokore, 2011) which creates unique challenges to providing these lone educators with collegial professional development in pedagogy and content knowledge. Art(s) educators are often isolated singletons in their buildings or districts (Bain, Newton, Kuster, & Milbrandt, 2010; Battersby & Verdi, 2015; Berwager, 2013; Cohen-Evron, 2002; Freedman, 2007; Gates, 2010; Hanawalt, 2105, 2016; Hanes & Schiller, 1994; Hochtritt et al., 2014; Milbrandt, 2006; Nahal, 2010; Paris, 2013; Scheib, 2006)

Although, there is limited research focused specifically on the *phenomenon* of the singleton educator (Hagin, 2020; Hansen, 2015; Loucks-Horsley et al., 2010; Loughran et al., 2012; Shulman, 1986; Sindberg 2011; Sindberg & Lipscomb, 2005; Wilson, Schweingruber, & Nielsen, 2015), research has exposed the need for singleton educators to access professional development communities that share their discipline (Battersby & Verdi, 2015; Berwager, 2013; Cohen-Evron, 2002; Freedman, 2007; Gates, 2010; Hanawalt, 2016; Hanes & Schiller, 1994; Hochtritt, Thulson, Delaney, Dornbush, & Shay, 2014; Milbrandt, 2006; Vanderlip-Taylor, 2018). The studies reviewed in this chapter documented singletons' descriptions of their prior or existing professional development experiences but do not explicitly explore the phenomenon of the singleton experience or solicit shared meaning making (Vygotsky, 1987) from these experiences. More information describing the *phenomenon* of the singleton educator would inform professional development initiatives better suited to accommodate the unique characteristics and needs of these lone educators (Ferriter et al. 2013; Hansen 2015; Hagin, 2020; Sindberg, 2014). Hansen (2015) acknowledged that singleton educators are often left out or placed in PLCs as an administrative afterthought. This approach is problematic and adversely affects community and team building, singleton teacher professional development, and teacher mindset (for both singletons and their colleagues). Professional development initiatives that include the input of participants in planning and decision-making are more successful than initiatives mandated from the top-down (Hargreaves & Dawe, 1990; Ingersoll & Alsalam, 1997; Pearson & Moomaw, 2005; Tye & Tye 1984).

An interpretive, psychological constructivist paradigm provides a framework to inductively explore the singleton phenomenon and through a process of individual meaning making (Vygotsky, 1987) and shared interpretation (Blumer, 1969; Nickerson, 2022)

constructing knowledge from participants' experiences (Richardson, 2003). In-depth interviews describing rural singleton art educators' experiences as lone educators in their buildings or districts will provide detailed descriptions of the characteristics of this phenomenon. Such a study will serve to inform strategies for professional development initiatives that serve this unique population of educators.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Introduction

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to conduct a narrative inquiry of the phenomenon of the rural singleton art teacher's experience and thereby elicit definitive characteristics of the singleton-teaching phenomenon as experienced by singleton art teachers and to inform an understanding of singleton-ness across disciplines. These characteristics will inform planning initiatives to provide professional development programs that support singleton art(s) educators' unique needs. Phenomenological research design values context and explores a phenomenon through the storied accounts of how participants experience it (Creswell, 2016). The following research questions guided this exploration: What are the characteristics of the phenomenon of the rural singleton art educator's experience? How do rural singleton art teachers describe their experiences as lone content specialists in their buildings or districts? What meaning do rural singleton art teachers make from their singleton teaching experiences? What shared meaning does a group of rural singleton art teachers make from their collective experience as lone content specialist in their school or district? How can this shared meaning inform initiatives to provide professional development for singleton arts educators?

This chapter is organized into the following subsections: conceptual framework, rationale of research approach, research setting and context, research sample and data sources, data collection methods, data analysis methods, issues of trustworthiness, limitations and delimitations, and summary.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework of a study "draws on theory, research, and experience, and examines the relationship among constructs and ideas" (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019). The previous chapters have reviewed the history of rural education and the difficulty in defining rural, described and evaluated a sampling of the limited research on the phenomenon of the singleton educator, and problematized collegial professional development initiatives in the context of meeting the needs of singleton educators. This section provides a theoretical and methodological bases for this study and lens for the analysis of findings. Additionally, this section provides evidence for the need for additional study in the area of singleton-ness, as experienced by art educators, located in the context of a rural school setting and demonstrates how this study will contribute to the existing body of knowledge. The literature review revealed the following constructs and provided justification for a study of the phenomenon of the singleton art educator.

1) Rural education is underrepresented in research (Barley & Brighham, 2008; Biddle, C., Sutherland, & McHenry-Sorber, 201; Billings, & Banks, 1993; Coladarci, 2007; Johnson, Mitchel, & Rotherham, 2014; Lavalley, Center for Public Education, 2018; Malhoit, 2005; McHenry-Sorber & Moffa; Pendall, Goodman, Zhu, & Gold, 2016; Reid, et al., 2010; Schafft, 2016; Tice, Billings, & Banks, 1993; Tice, Wilson, Floden, & Ferrini-Mundy, 2001).

2) Professional isolation among singleton educators is common in rural and small districts (Battersby & Verdi, 2015; Berwager, 2013; Cohen-Evron, 2002; Ferriter et al., 2013; Gates, 2010; Hanes & Schiller, 1994; Hansen, 2015; Richmond & Manokore, 2011; Brook 2011; Inwood 2001).

3) There is a gap in research focused specifically on the phenomenon of singleton educators (Hagin 2020; Hansen, 2015; Loucks-Horsley et al., 2010; Loughran et al., 2012; Shulman,

1986; Sindberg, 2011; Sindberg & Lipscomb, 2005; Wilson, Schweingruber, & Nielsen, 2015).

4) Art(s) educators are often isolated singletons in their buildings or districts (Bain, Newton, Kuster, & Milbrandt, 2010; Battersby & Verdi, 2015; Berwager, 2013; Cohen-Evron, 2002; Freedman, 2007; Gates, 2010; Hanawalt, 2105, 2016; Hanes & Schiller, 1994; Hochtritt et al., 2014; Milbrandt, 2006; Nahal, 2010; Paris, 2013; Scheib, 2006).

5) Current scholarship promotes teacher professional development and collaboration in pedagogical content knowledge (PCK)(Shulman, 1986) and content knowledge (CK) to improve teacher quality and student outcome(s) (Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2005; Day et al., 2007; Garet, Porter, Desimone, Birman & Yoon, 2001; Leana, 2011; Loucks-Horsley et al., 2010; Loughran et al., 2012; Malhoit 2005; Morrissey, 2000; Nias, Southworth, & Yeomans, 1989; Rosenholtz, 1989; Schleifer, Rinehart, &Yanisch, 2017; Shulman, 1986; Talbert & McLaughlin, 1994; Vescio, Ross, & Adams, 2008).

6) Federal (ESSA, USDOE, 2015) and New York State (100.2[dd] Professional Development Plans Terms, NYSED, 2018) law mandate districts provide access to and supports for teacher professional development (PD) including arts educators.

7) Current models of PD in the form of school or district level professional development communities, PLCs, (Hord, 1997/2003; DuFour, 2004; DuFour & Eaker, 1998; DuFour, Eaker, & DuFour, 2005), Critical Friends Groups (Curry 2008), and Communities of Practice (Wegner, 1998), to name a few, are not adequately designed to accommodate singleton educators (Bain et al., 2010; Battersby & Verdi, 2015; Berwager, 2013; Cohen-Evron, 2002; Cutts, Robertson, Donaldson & O'Donnell; Dornbush, & Shay, 2014; 2017, Freedman, 2007; Ferriter et al., 2013; Gates, 2010; Hanawalt, 2015, 2016; Hanes & Schiller, 1994; Hansen,

2015; Hochtritt et al., 2014; Kim, 2010; Milbrandt, 2006; Paris, 2013; Shay, 2014; Shore & Stokes, 2006).

8) Professional development initiatives that do not include the input of participants in planning and decision making often fail when they are mandated from the top-down (Hargreaves & Dawe, 1990; Ingersoll & Alsalam, 1997; Pearson & Moomaw, 2005; Tye & Tye 1984), inconsistent and haphazard (Pomson, 2005), perceived (by participants) as contrived congeniality (Hargreaves, 1994).

9) The creation of professional development communities for singletons requires a better understanding of the phenomenon of the singleton educator, his/her lived experience (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Creswell, 2007; Glesne, 1999; Moustakes 1994;) and community context (Biddle & Azano, 2016; Bogden & Biklen, 2007; Coladarci, 2007; Hawley, et al., 2016)(Ferriter et al., 2013; Hagin, 2020; Hansen, 2015; Hargreaves & Dawe, 1990; Tye & Tye, 1984).

10) A better understanding of the lived, contextual, experience of singleton art educators in rural communities could inform the development of effective PLCs for singleton art(s) educators and singletons in general.

In addition to the information provided in the literature review, personal experiences inform my interest and motivation for this study. As an art and enrichment educator in a small rural school district, I have firsthand experience as a singleton educator. Many of the experiences described by participants in the reviewed studies mirror my own experiences. In the beginning of my career as an elementary art teacher, I was asked to teach gifted and talented (GT) enrichment courses in addition to my art courses. It is common in small and rural districts for educators to have multiple teaching assignments (Barley & Brigham, 2008; Barrow & Burchett, 2000;

LaGarry & Richard, 2018). Because this assignment was outside my area of expertise, and I was the lone educator teaching GT, I had to find communities outside of my district for support in professional development and curriculum resources. Although this experience was rewarding, it was also at times challenging and isolating to be without GT content peers in my district. Recently, as a singleton high school advanced art teacher in the same district, I became involved in an Arts Leadership Network implemented by our regional BOCES (Board of Cooperative Educational Services). The purpose of this network was to provide professional support for districts in arts programming and curriculum development in response to the implementation of the 2017 N.Y.S. Revised Learning Standards for the Arts.

Although the network meetings were informative, the expectation was that arts educators would work together with their district colleagues (PLC) to develop a mission statement, program goals, and district arts curriculum map. District curriculum coordinators, arts educators, and some administrators attended the meetings and worked together on the facilitator assigned tasks. When the facilitators asked participants to "breakout" into their district planning groups, the "singletons" were on their own. Seeing this, the facilitators encouraged singletons to work together across districts. Although the activities were not designed for singletons working together, the breakout sessions provided opportunity for conversations among singletons about the challenges of being a lone educator in one's district. The need for Professional Learning Networks (PLNs) designed to bring singleton educators across districts together for PD that recognized the unique characteristics of the singleton educator was evident. This experience caused me to wonder how professional development could be (better) designed to meet the needs of singleton art(s) educators. In this case, and as often documented in the literature (Ferriter et al., 2013; Fulton & Britton, 2011; Hansen, 2015; Venables, 2011), the Arts Leadership Network

was not designed to meet the unique needs of participants who did not have content colleagues or curriculum specialists with whom to collaborate.

It is important to know more about the phenomenon of the singleton art educator in the context of his/her school and community environment to design professional development programs that meet his/her unique needs. To divorce context from singletons' experiences as lone content teachers in their buildings or districts would be repeating the mistakes of the past. To assume that all singletons' contextual experiences as lone educators are the same would be like defining all rural schools as the same and without the context that helps define them. Singleton-ness becomes a "singleton problem" in a manner that correlates with the "rural school problem" (Cubberley, 1912). To avoid a deficit perspective on singleton-ness one must flip the narrative. Singletons and singleton-ness is not "the problem." Rather, the challenge or question to explore is how can we better support singleton educators and what do we need to know about their teaching environment (context) and the characteristics of their singleton-ness to understand and meet their needs? For this reason, a qualitative methodology was chosen for this study. Qualitative research values context. "To divorce the act, word, or gesture from its context is, for the qualitative researcher, to lose sight of significance" (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007, p. 5). Qualitative researchers collect rich, descriptive data (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Creswell, 2014) to gain understanding of the phenomenon studied.

Through an inductive process, the qualitative researcher constructs meaning from the data he/she collects. Qualitative research methods allow the researcher to gather information and make meaning (Patton, 2015) from participants' accounts of their experience. Sindberg & Lipscomb (2005) realized that the survey methods used in their quantitative study of singleton music educators lacked the descriptive information about the lived experience of participants

necessary to elicit understanding of the *why* of the participants' survey responses. In a later study, Sindberg (2014) employed a qualitative approach, interviewing participants to gain a better, more descriptive, understanding of their experience as singletons. A phenomenological perspective is interpretive and acknowledges that the researcher cannot assume they know what things mean to their participants (Douglas, 1976). Meaning is subjective (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007), experiential (Dewey, 1938), conceptual (Geertz, 1973), and socially constructed (Berger & Luckmann, 1967). Qualitative researchers are particularly interested in participant-perspectives (Erickson, 1986). The nature of the study of a group of individuals (singletons) who share a similar circumstance (serving as singleton art educators in rural communities) is nuanced and rooted in personal experience and interpretation. A constructivist paradigm suits a study of this nature. A paradigm (Mertens, 2005; Bogdan & Biklen, 1998) is a theoretical framework that guides how knowledge is studied and interpreted. Bogdan and Biklen (1998) describe a paradigm as "a loose collection of logically related assumptions, concepts, or propositions that orient thinking and research" (p.22). Cohen and Manion (1994) describe it as "the philosophical intent or motivation for undertaking a study" (p.38). Other terms to describe an interpretive theoretical framework are "knowledge claims" (Creswell, 2003), epistemology, ontology, and research methodologies (Neuman, 2000).

Constructivist theory asserts that individuals construct understandings or knowledge derived from the interaction between what they already know and believe and the new experiences they encounter (Cannella & Reiff, 1994; Resnick, 1989; Richardson, 1997). The two main interpretations of constructivism are Piaget's psychological constructivism and Vygotsky's social constructivism. Piaget's constructivist theory of cognitive development is rooted in the assertion that change in cognition, like evolution, is regulated by equilibrium. Equilibrium is

defined as a non-linier, "dynamic process of self-regulating behavior" balancing assimilation and accommodation resulting in new knowledge. Assimilation, as an organization of experience, is "the individual's self-assertive tendency, a tendency to view, understand, and act on the 'surround' with one's own activity or ideas to preserve one's autonomy as a part within a whole system" (Fosnot & Perry, 2005, p. 10). Accommodation occurs when a new situation or experience challenges one's existing equilibrium and forces one to search for new understanding through a succession of constructions.

Vygotsky's social constructivist theory (Vygotsky, 1978) posits that learners are active participants of their own knowledge making and that learning takes place primarily in social and cultural settings. Vygotsky's zone of proximal development (ZPD) describes the difference between activities learners can do independently and activities they cannot do without the help of a teacher. The ZPD is the place where prior knowledge and experience meets new experience and knowledge facilitated by a more knowledgeable other, teacher. Social constructivist theory suggests that teaching and learning are dependent upon social interaction and discussion and that these experiences facilitate learning. Dewey (1938) also asserted that learning is a social process occurring between an individual, objects, and other people. Dewey's theory of continuity states that, "all experiences, past and present, are carried forward to influence future experiences and decisions" (p. 35).

Thompson (2000) asserts that constructivism is a model of knowing that can be used to "build" a theory of learning. Richardson (2003) elaborates on the distinctions between social constructivism and psychological constructivism noting that both are social in nature. Phillips (2000) attributes two "lenses" to the distinction between social and psychological constructivism. One, social constructivism supports the theory that bodies of knowledge or disciplines are

"human constructs", and that these constructs are determined by "politics, ideologies, values, the exertion of power and preservation of status, religious beliefs, and economic self-interest" (Phillips, 2000, p.6). Two, psychological constructivism supports the theory that individual learners construct meaning around a phenomenon based upon their prior knowledge and experience. Additionally, meaning development can occur in the context of a social group where individuals in the group can "come to an agreement about the nature and warrant of a description of a phenomenon or its relationship to others" (Richardson, 2003, p. 3). These shared meaning(s) then become formal knowledge. A psychological constructivist paradigm allows for interpretation and shared knowledge making among a group of individuals who share a phenomenon, teaching as singletons, yet have different lived and teaching experiences and backgrounds. Through an inductive process, participants' perspectives (Erickson, 1986) can be collected and compared to construct an understanding of the singleton phenomenon.

Symbolic interactionism (Mead, 1934) identifies meaning as a product of social interactions. "Interpretivism is an approach to social science that asserts that understanding the beliefs, motivations, and reasoning of individuals in a social situation is essential to decoding the meaning of the data that can be collected around a phenomenon" (Nickerson, 2022, p.1). Human experience is mediated by interpretation (Blumer, 1969). "We must recognize that the activity of human beings consists of meeting a flow of situations in which they have to act and that their action is built on the basis of what they note, how they assess and interpret what they note, and what kind of projected lines of action they map out" (Blumer, 1969, p. 15). Hermeneutics, which refers to the philosophy of interpretation and understanding (Williams, 2000) emphasizes the importance of language and context in understanding (Smith, 1991). Creswell notes that the interpretive/constructivist researcher relies upon "participants' views of the situation being

studied" to "generate or inductively develop a theory or pattern of meanings" (2003, p. 8-9). Additionally, the interpretive/constructivist researcher must recognize the impact of his or her own background and experience as part of the interpretive process. Individuals create interpretations with the help of others and through this interaction, they (co)construct meaning (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007).

To gain understanding of the phenomenon of the singleton art educator in a rural school context one must recognize and value the unique characteristics of the communities in which singletons work. Additionally, one must recognize the individualized nature of singleton educators' teaching experiences and background. A phenomenological study of singleton art educators in a rural context will provide accounts of these educators' lived experience and provide data to inform singleton professional development initiatives. An interpretive psychological constructivist paradigm provides a framework to inductively explore the singleton phenomenon and through a process of shared interpretation, construct meaning from participants' experiences.

Dolbeare and Schuman (Shuman, 1986) recommend a three-interview series to create a relationship between the interviewer and interviewee, to establish context, and to "plumb the experience" (Seidman, 2006). The first interview focuses on life history, the second on the details of present life experience(s), and the third on reflecting upon the meaning of these experiences. This approach is constructivist in nature and interpretive, as Hagin (2020) identified. This phenomenological semi-structured interview approach allows the researcher to explore individual, contextual accounts recognizing that each participant's lived experience is uniquely his/her own.

Both Hagin (2020) and Sindberg (2014) conducted case-studies exploring specific problems or issues experienced by singletons. Sindberg's study explored professional isolation and connectedness, and Hagin explored singleton's professional learning experiences. For this study the focus is to determine characteristics of the phenomenon itself. What are the characteristics of singleness as experienced by singleton art educators in small rural school districts and what shared meaning can be made from their singleton experiences? Creswell (2016) draws a distinction between case-study research and phenomenological research. Case-study research focuses on the case to "illustrate a problem or issue" where phenomenological research "describes how a number of individuals experience a specific phenomenon" (Creswell, 2016). Additionally, narrative research methodology, as described by Connelly and Clandinin (2006) is the study of "experience as story". Individuals describe and interpret their experiences as a narrative and from these stories one can gain understanding of their experience. The story is the phenomenon being studied. In education this methodology has been used to develop an understanding of teaching and learning. Individuals, teachers and students, describe their lived experiences and interpret meaning from their storied accounts. Kim (2016) explains how Connelly and Clandinin (2006) describe story as "a portal through which a person enters the world and by which their experience of the world is interpreted and made personally meaningful" (p. 18). Through the complex stories of experience one can gain an understanding of a phenomenon and universal themes can be discovered.

For the purposes of this study participants were asked to tell their stories of experience through the lens of their experience as singleton educators. A phenomenological design best suited this distinction. This study defines singleton-ness as a phenomenon experienced by singleton educators. Singleton-ness as a state of being. This lens allowed the participants to

interpret and "make meaningful" the storied account of their lived experiences as singleton art teachers. Singleton-ness is not a problem or issue to be solved but rather a phenomenon experienced by those who are the only content teacher in their school or district. Exploring singleton-ness in the context of participants' lived experiences provided an opportunity to identify characteristics of this phenomenon and brought singletons together to identify common/agreed upon characteristics of the phenomenon itself.

When looking back to the history of rural school reform, not respecting/valuing local context and local knowledge as part of reform initiatives was frequently identified as a factor in failed attempts to understand and meet the learning needs of teachers and children in these communities. Rural communities have unique characteristics that influence the context of their school. These characteristics influence, both positively and potentially negatively, the context in which rural schoolteachers teach. Because singleton teachers across rural school districts may not share the same contextual setting (community characteristics), their experiences as rural singleton art educators may have characteristics unique to and best understood by, their contextual situation. Like the "nagging problem" (Jordan & Hargrove, 1987) of the operationalization of the definition of rural, described earlier in this report, defining singleton educators in the context of their teaching environment is vital to the understanding of this phenomenon. Storied descriptions of participant experience elicited through a three-interview series (Shuman, 1986; Seidman, 2006), contextual information such as the four dimensions of defining rural places (see Brown & Schafft, 2011), and observation in the form of field-notes and site descriptions can provide rich detailed information about the context of each participant's experience in this study. Having detailed accounts of context can provide clarity for the generalizability of a study's findings (Coladarci, 2007). In this instance, the context of individual

singletons and their descriptions of experience can inform how these experiences relate to their unique professional development needs. To generalize singletons' experience without rich contextual information and storied accounts of their experience would repeat the mistakes of the past. Education reform initiatives in the form district teacher professional development communities have already labeled the placement of singletons as a logistical problem or "administrative afterthought" (Hansen, 2015). As previously noted, professional development initiatives that do not include the input of participants in planning and decision making often fail when they are mandated from the top-down (Hargreaves & Dawe, 1990; Ingersoll & Alsalam, 1997; Pearson & Moomaw, 2005; Tye & Tye 1984). Effective professional development for rural singleton art educators must begin with an understanding of the phenomenon of the singleton art educator's lived experience.

Although each of the studies reviewed focused on the experiences of singleton educators, none of the studies presented both an account of the singleton's experience as individuals and as a group of individuals who share a common phenomenon. Additionally, they did not explore the phenomenon itself to identify characteristics shared by singletons across communities. Through the interview process of putting into language their experience(s) as singleton art educators, participants can make meaning (Vygotsky, 1987) of the characteristics of this phenomenon. Psychological constructivism provides a theoretical approach to meaning making across experiences. Through a panel discussion of the phenomenon of the singleton art educator, participants came together to co-create meaning from their shared experiences and identified their common professional development wants and needs. These meanings, common understandings or shared truths, then become knowledge (Phillips, 2000; Richardson, 2003).

This knowledge can then inform professional development initiatives for rural singleton art educators.

Rationale for Research Approach

When exploring the nature of a phenomenon, a qualitative research methodology is appropriate to elicit rich, descriptive, contextual data (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Creswell, 2014; Creswell & Guetterman, 2019). Qualitative research methods allow the researcher to gather information and make meaning (Patton, 2015) from participants' accounts of their experience. Qualitative research values context. "To divorce the act, word, or gesture from its context is, for the qualitative researcher, to lose sight of significance" (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007, p. 5). This study explored the phenomenon of singleton-ness as experienced by the singleton art educator in the context of his/her rural school environment. Both Sindberg (2014) and Hagin (2020) explored problems or issues singletons experience (professional isolation and connectedness and professional development) but did not explore the phenomenon of singleton-ness as experienced by their singleton participants.

Phenomenological research design values context and explores a phenomenon through the storied accounts of how participants experience it (Creswell, 2016). A psychological constructivist paradigm (Bogdan & Bilken, 1998; Mertens, 2005) guided the methodology and methods of this study. Psychological constructivist theory states that individual learners construct meaning around a phenomenon based upon their prior knowledge and experience (Piaget, 1970). Patton (2015) refers to qualitative inquiry as a process by which individuals construct and attach meaning to their lived experiences. Phillips (2000) adds a social component to psychological constructivist theory noting that meaning development can occur in the context of a social group where individuals in the group can "come to an agreement about the nature and warrant of a

description of a phenomenon or its relationship to others" (Richardson, 2003, p. 3). This shared

meaning then becomes formal knowledge. A psychological constructivist paradigm provided a

theoretical framework that recognized that individuals, singleton rural arts educators, have their

own unique stories to tell and through the sharing of these stories, a more nuanced understanding

of the singleton phenomenon can be developed. An inductive process of gathering stories of

participant perspectives (Erickson, 1986) of teaching as singletons in rural communities

recognizes the value of each participant's individual contextual experience. These individual

experiences inform an understanding of the singleton experience across contexts. Bogdan and

Bilken (2007) describe this as "constructing a picture that takes shape as you collect and examine

the parts" (p. 6). Additionally, bringing participants together for a panel discussion of their

singleton experiences, allowed the participants to explore their singleton experience through a

shared lens and construct their collective (new) meaning of *singleton-ness* (Phillips, 2020).

Research methods should match the purpose of a study, the questions being explored, and

the resources available (Patton, 2015). The questions explored in this study collect rich, thick

descriptive accounts and analysis of singleton's contextual experiences as rural arts educators. A

study of this nature required a qualitative research design (Creswell, 2014; Meriam & Tisdell,

2016; Patton, 2015). Historically, research in rural education has failed to value context when

assessing the assets and needs of rural communities and their teachers (Biddle & Azano, 2016).

This study recognized that not all rural communities and school contexts are the same and that

singleton educators each have their own unique experiences as singleton educators. Additionally,

to design professional learning communities for rural singleton arts educators, developers need to

understand more about the phenomenon of the singleton experience and how these educators

make meaning of these experiences as individuals (Patton, 2015) and as a group (Phillips, 2000).

This philosophical perspective acknowledged that initiatives to serve communities of individuals need to begin with the voices of those being served.

Research Setting/Context

The context of this study focused on the phenomenon of the singleton arts educator teaching in a rural school district. Education research historically underrepresents rural school communities favoring an urban normative view of the field of education (Biddle & Azano 2016; Biddle, Sutherland, & McHenry-Sorber 2019; Burdick-Will & Logan, 2017, Isserman, 2005; LaGarry, Lavalley, Johnson & Howley, 2015; Schafft, 2016; Sherwood, 2001; Thomas et. al. 2011). Singleton educators are common in rural and small districts (Ferriter et al. 2013, Hansen, 2015; Richmond & Manokore, 2011). A singleton is as a lone teacher who is solely responsible for teaching a specialty subject, such as art, technology, and physics, or any teacher singly responsible for teaching a subject in a building or district (Ferriter et al., 2013; Hansen, 2015; Leane & Yost, 2022; Venables, 2011). Participants in this study were defined as singletons if they serve as a lone art educator in their building or district or are the lone grade level art content specialty teacher in their building or district. When developing professional learning communities, singletons are often addressed as an afterthought or not at all (Hansen, 2015). Arts educators are often the lone content specialist in their building or district and do not have other content specialist to collaborate with (Battersby & Verdi, 2015; Berwager, 2013; Cohen-Evron, 2002; Freedman, 2007; Gates, 2010; Hanawalt, 2016; Hanes & Schiller, 1994; Hochtritt, Thulson, Delaney, Dornbush, & Shay, 2014; Milbrandt, 2006). There is a paucity of research available on the topic of singleton educators and little to no research in the area of singleton arts educators or singletons in rural education (Hagin, 2020; Sindberg 2011; Sindberg & Lipscomb 2005; Wilson, Schweingruber, & Nielsen, 2015). Choosing to locate this study in rural communities provided an opportunity to gather valuable information regarding the phenomenon

of the singleton arts educator within a context that is frequently associated with this phenomenon across disciplines.

Rural education researchers recommend clarity when defining rural in the context of research. There are many definitions of rural. As noted in the literature review, one of the biggest challenges to rural education research is defining rural (Christiaens, 2015; Coburn, MacKinney, McBride, Mueller, Slifkin & Wakefield 2007; Coladarci, 2007; Cromartie & Bucholtz, 2008; Freeman & Randolph; Hart, Larson & Lishner, 2005; Hawley, Kozoil, Bovaird, McCormack, & Welch 2016; Howley, Theobald, & S.C. Howley, 2005; Moffa & McHenry-Sorber, 2018; Nespar, 2008; U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). There is no one definition that provides an efficient theoretical construct of rural education research (Coburn et al., 2007; Coladarci, 2007; Cromartie & Bucholtz, 2008; Hart, Larson, Lishner, 2005; Howley, Theobald, & S.C. Howley, 2005; Hawley, Koziol, Bovaird, McCormick, & Greg, 2016). Some describe rural as what is left over after urban is defined (Farmer, 1997) and not non-metropolitan (Isserman, 2005; Roberts and Green, 2013). Hawley et al. (2016) recommended that when choosing a rural definition, researchers consider two major questions: (a) what community characteristics are important in my study's conceptualization of rurality and (b) what level of classification is most appropriate for my study's objectives. The authors note that, "When several definitions are reasonable, it is up to the researcher to provide a precise explanation of the construct and tailor the research to a particular definition, thereby allowing future researchers to evaluate and critique how the construct, in this case rurality, was operationalized (Shadish et al., 2002)" (Hawley, et al. 2016, p.5). Rich detailed information about the (rural) context of a study, including descriptions of the people, setting, and characteristics provide more clarity of the generalizability of a study's findings (Coladarci, 2007). Hawley, Koziol, Bovaird, McCormick, & Welch (2016)

recommended a narrative approach to defining rural, allowing for a rich contextual description that provides readers with "sufficient detail about the study's geographic context" (p. 4). "Getting rural right does not mean picking one definition but, rather, providing clear, detailed information to readers so they understand how the rural context is delineated from other contexts" (Hawley et al., 2016, p. 4).

The U.S. Census Bureau (USCB) defines rural communities as places with populations of less than 2500 residents. The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) defines rural by population and geographic distance to an urbanized area (population of 50,000 or more residents) or urban cluster (population of less than 50,000 but 2,500 or more residents). Rural falls into these three geographic distance categories:

Rural – Fringe, a census-defined rural territory that is less than or equal to 5 miles from an urbanized area, as well as rural territory that is less than or equal to 2.5 miles from an urban cluster.

Rural – Distant, a census-defined rural territory that is more than 5 miles but less than or equal to 25 miles from an urbanized area, as well as rural territory that is more than 2.5 miles but less than or equal to 10 miles from an urban cluster, and

Rural – Remote, a census-defined rural territory that is more than 25 miles from an urbanized area and also more than 10 miles from an urban cluster.

The following criteria were used in defining the rural status of school districts canvased for this study: districts located in communities defined as rural (Rural 42-Distant and Rural 41-Fringe Census Classification Codes) by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), districts with total student enrollment of less than 1000 students pre-kindergarten thru twelfth grade, districts with a total population of residents of less than 7500 people, and districts with

Rural Schools Association membership or affiliation. In addition, rich contextual, narrative descriptions of each of the rural school communities (Coladarci, 2007) add clarity and validity to the operationalization of the term rural as the context of this study.

Research Sample and Data Sources

This phenomenological study exploring the characteristics of the phenomenon of the rural singleton art educator purposefully sampled participants from rural school districts across a designated BOCES region in New York State. Eight BOCES districts in this region met the predetermined criteria as rural. In the eight districts, eighteen art teachers are singletons. Each district superintendent was emailed a letter to introduce the research project and to request a letter of cooperation to allow the district's singleton art educators to be contacted to participate in the study. Of the eight districts, six districts responded, and five superintendents agreed to allow teachers to be contacted regarding the study and one declined. Next, singleton art teachers from each of the five districts were contacted to invite them to participate in the study. Seven teachers representing four districts and six schools agreed to participate. Participants were provided an Internal Review Board (IRB) approved description of the study and contract to review before the first interview. Additionally, participants were asked to complete a questionnaire (Appendix A) soliciting background information such as teaching history, course responsibilities, and professional development opportunities. Each participant participated in a three-interview series.

Dolbeare and Schuman (Shuman, 1986) recommend a three-interview series to create a relationship between the interviewer and interviewee, to establish context, and to "plumb the experience" (Seidman, 2006). The first interview focuses on life history, the second on the details of present life experience(s), and the third on reflecting upon the meaning of these experiences. When considering the number of interviews or cases to study, Beitlin (2012)

recommends six to twelve participants. Kim (2016) agrees with six to twelve if there is thematic redundancy after six interviews. Others recommend quality over quantity with at least three rounds of life-story interviews per participant (Kvale, 1996). Guest, Bunce, and Johnson (2006) claim saturation as the "gold standard". When the participants have shared all they want to share, and data no longer reveals new knowledge only redundant knowledge, then the qualitative researcher has reached saturation (Kim, 2016; Ortega, 2013). This study included seven participants across four districts.

Enlisting storied accounts from multiple sites added to the depth and breadth of the study. Each rural school community has its own unique identity. Lived accounts of singleton educators experience across communities allowed for comparisons and interpretive analysis of the storied accounts of the contextualized inferences and meanings that underlie the singleton phenomenon. Including multiple accounts in a study is a strategy for enhancing the generalizability and validity of its findings (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Additionally, because of the individualized nature of this phenomenon and the inherent isolation that is associated with *singleton-ness* and professional development opportunities, individual and group analysis is essential to an understanding of how to provide effective PD opportunities for art(s) singletons in the form of professional learning communities (PLCs) across communities.

Another data source for this study was a virtual panel discussion. The panel discussion allowed participants to collaboratively discuss their experiences and co-construct *new* meaning of these experiences through the lens of the group. These meanings, common understandings, or shared truths, then become knowledge (Phillips, 2000; Richardson, 2003). Other data sources included field notes, artifacts, and descriptive demographic data identifying characteristics of the districts and communities.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations and the protection of research participants is central to research design (Maxwell, 2009; Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). Bogdan & Biklen (2007) identify two dominant official ethical guidelines when conducting research with "human subjects": informed consent and protection from harm. **"**Human subject" is defined as a "living individual about whom an investigator (whether professional or student) conducting research: (i) obtains information or biospecimens through intervention or interaction with the individual, and uses, studies, or analyzes the information or biospecimens; or (ii) obtains, uses, studies, analyzes, or generates identifiable private information or identifiable biospecimens" (45CFR46.102(I). Rural singleton arts educators teaching in the previously defined BOCES region were invited to voluntarily participate in this study.

Following Internal Review Board (IRB) guidelines, prior to signing an informed consent form (Creswell, 2007), participants in this study were informed of the objectives of the study and allowed to ask questions regarding their participation. Participants were made aware that participation is voluntary and that they had the freedom to withdraw from the study at any time. Each participant's identity was replaced with a pseudonym to protect his/her anonymity in reporting these findings. Additionally, participants had the opportunity to review their transcripts to make changes and clarify information as they saw appropriate after each interview. The narrative account of the participant's singleton story was also shared with the participant for his/her review. Participants were invited to request corrections to their stories to add clarity and ensure that their experiences were accurately documented. Lincoln and Guba (1985) recommend sharing the final report with participants for review prior to publication to add credibility to the study. Although the initial interview necessitated a visit to the participant's school environment,

participants were offered the option to choose a different location for the remaining two interviews.

Additionally, all information including recorded interviews and transcripts, artifacts, documents, and field notes were securely stored at the researcher's home to ensure participants privacy and confidentiality (Creswell, 2007). Finally, participants were made aware that they will not be monetarily compensated or otherwise directly benefit from participation in this study. Benefit to participants did, however, come in the form of having their stories contribute to the field of knowledge of the characteristics of the phenomenon of the singleton art educator. Additionally, findings from this study will inform future professional development initiatives offered to art(s) educators in this region.

Data Collection Methods:

Data collection methods for this study included a three-interview series per participant, virtual panel discussion, field notes, artifacts, and background/demographic questionnaire. Seidman (2006) recommends a three 90-minute interview series (Schuman, 1982) for contextual (Patton, 1989), phenomenological, data collection. The first interview focused on the participants' life history and general context of experience. The second interview gathered information regarding the participant's "concrete details" of his/her present experience as a singleton educator. The third interview allowed the participant to reflect upon the meaning of his/her experience as a singleton art educator in a rural district and share wants and needs as a singleton educator.

Prior to each subsequent interview, participants received a copy of the previous interview transcript so they could review the data and clarify or amend statements, as necessary. Member-checks allow respondents to review data and findings to ensure validity (Creswell, 2014; Merriam, 1998; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Yin, 2014). Additionally, this three-interview series

allowed the interviewer to create a logical structure for this open-ended, in-depth form of inquiry (Seidman, 2006). Each interview series was scheduled to take place within a three-week period. At the completion of all the interviews, participants were invited to participate in a virtual panel discussion. Participants had the opportunity to explore the shared meaning(s) of their singleton experiences (Phillips, 2000; Richardson, 2003). The virtual panel discussion took place via a Zoom meeting that was recorded and transcribed for later analysis. Other contextual data collected included observations from field notes and artifacts, such as building layout and teacher schedules. A participant questionnaire collected information such as participant's years teaching, area of specialization, other subjects or grade levels taught, etc. (Appendix A) Tools used for data collection included a pre-interview questionnaire, camera to collect photographs of community and school context, audio recorder, Otter.ai transcription software, notebook/tablet for recording field notes, and personal computer.

Data Analysis Methods

Data collection and analysis for this study enlisted an ongoing and inductive process to construct meaning from the lived experiences of rural singleton art educators in a region in New York State. Using inductive interpretive analysis of collected teacher narratives, the storied accounts of participants' singleton experiences were coded and analyzed to reveal patterns (characteristics) and contextual inferences and meanings (themes and personal attributes or skills) that underlie the singleton phenomenon (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). An inductive process of gathering stories of participant perspectives (Erickson, 1986) of singleton-ness across rural communities allowed for a more comprehensive, contextual, analysis and understanding of the phenomenon of singleton-ness. Similarities and differences in context and experience were identified for analysis. Data was analyzed through an interpretive, constructivist lens. "Interpretivism is an approach to social science that asserts that understanding the beliefs,

motivations, and reasoning of individuals in a social situation is essential to decoding the meaning of the data that can be collected around a phenomenon" (Nickerson, 2022, p.1).

As patterns or themes emerged in the data the themes were recorded, coded, and analyzed to identify characteristics of singleton-ness and attributes of singletons. Artifacts, field notes, community, and questionnaire data (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Moustakas, 1994) was recorded and analyzed to identify similarities and differences between participants' experiences to add to the depth of the contextual data. Additionally, demographic, and general background information regarding participants' prior experience with teaching, routines, and experiences with professional development opportunities, etc. added to the depth and breadth of the analysis and informed an understanding of what each participant reported in relationship to his/her singleton experience (Merriam, 1998; Patton, 2015). Finally, four of the seven participants participated in a virtual panel discussion. This process of shared meaning making (Seidman, 2013) allowed participants to compare and interpret the initial list of characteristics that emerged from the data as identified as representative of the singleton phenomenon. Through a presentation, discussion, and evaluation of the data, participants co-constructed a shared understanding of their experience as singletons (Phillips, 2000; Richardson, 2003) and the singleton phenomenon. Prior to the virtual panel discussion, all participants were sent a shared document with a combined list of characteristics of the singleton phenomenon that they each identified as being associated with their experience. Additionally, they were sent a list of personal skills and attributes that they identified as having, developing, or needing as singletons. Participants were asked to review the characteristics and skills and mark with an X the ones that stood out as part of their experience to activate their reflection prior to the virtual meeting.

Issues of Trustworthiness

Triangulation of data (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Yin, 2014), member-checks (Creswell, 2014; Merriam, 1998; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Yin, 2014), field notes (Saldaña, 2016), comparative analysis and purposeful sampling (Bogden & Biklen, 2007) and the use of an inductive interpretive analysis (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) are methods used to ensure reliability of findings in this study. Reliability or trustworthiness in qualitative research is concerned with how well the data reported reflects what "actually occurs in the setting under study" (Bogden & Biklen, 2007, p.40). In this case, trustworthiness is how well the data reported represents the detailed, contextual experiences of singleton art educators in rural districts.

To ensure trustworthiness and relevancy, singleton art teachers were purposefully selected from districts that met a predetermined definition of rural. Rich, descriptive, contextual information about the characteristics of each rural community was collected to enhance the reliability of the claim of "rural" in the context of this study (Coladarci, 2007; Hawley et al., 2016). Additionally, participants had the opportunity to review their interview transcripts and findings to co-construct an accurate account of their singleton teaching experience. Finally, participants had the opportunity to participate in a panel discussion of their experiences as singleton art teachers in rural districts and compare and contrast the findings of their experiences to form new, shared understandings of the characteristics the phenomenon of singleton-ness.

Limitations and Delimitations

In any research study, it is important to consider what conditions might limit the scope of a study and its outcomes. Although this study encompasses a region of eight rural districts in Central New York and solicited participants from a pool of eighteen potential candidates, only six districts responded, and five districts completed a Letter of Cooperation. Of those five districts, seven teachers from four districts volunteered to participate. Although six cases are

identified as a sufficient number of cases according to some sources (Beitlin, 2012; Kim, 2016), other sources recommend continuing one's research until redundancy or data saturation (Guest et al., 2006; Ortega, 2013). Ideally, securing at least one participant from each of the identified districts would have added to the scope of this study.

Three of the districts had two teachers participate. One district with two-participant teachers included one recently retired high school level teacher and one elementary teacher located in another building and community within the district. Another two-participant district had one nine through twelfth grade high school teacher and one seven through twelfth grade Jr/Sr high school teacher whose classroom was in another building. The third, two-participant district, included one Pre-K through sixth grade elementary teacher and one seven through twelfth grade Jr/Sr high school art and ceramics teacher, each located in separate buildings. The seven through twelfth grade teacher in this district was in a Jr/Sr high school building that had another art teacher who teaches nine through twelfth grade advanced art. The fourth district had one participant who teaches Pre-K through sixth grade in a Pre-K through twelve building. In this district the building space is divided into elementary and Jr/Sr high sections. There is also a Jr/Sr high school art teacher in this district.

A three-interview sequence was conducted with each participant. After each interview the transcript was shared with the participant for their review. Participants had the opportunity to review the transcript and identify any concerns, misrepresentations or omissions and make clarifications at any time with the researcher. Few corrections or clarifications were requested. It was, however, evident at times that participants did review the transcripts. Reflections such as "I didn't realize how often I say like" or "it seems to look fine" were communicated with the researcher. Additionally, a narrative report of the participant's singleton story was shared with

each participant following the conclusion of their last interview. Participants again had the opportunity to clarify or amend their stories. No amendments were requested. Although participants could correct misrepresentations, and all participants were very forthcoming in their interview responses indicating a level of comfort with sharing their stories, there is still a possibility that an individual might not feel comfortable asking for corrections to be made.

The final phase of this study was the panel discussion. The original intent was to have an in-person panel discussion. Ideally, participants would come together in person, have time to get to know one another and reflect upon their singleton experiences, and then participate in a facilitated open-ended discussion of the characteristics of singleton-ness. Unfortunately, scheduling an in-person meeting was not possible. Teachers' schedules did not allow for such a gathering. Finally, a one-hour virtual meeting time was set, with the hope that all could attend for at least a portion of the time. Four teachers attended. Two of the other teachers shared their choices for character traits on the Google doc but could not attend in person. One could not attend or respond to the doc due to a family emergency. The meeting was, however, productive but not as intended.

A delimitation, intentionally imposed limitation, of this study was the solicitation of participants from districts identified as rural. The use of purposeful sampling for this study allowed the findings to be identified as a rural and singleton phenomenon. Rural in the context of community setting, but not rural in that singleton-ness is only present in rural contexts, described in the literature as "uniquely rural." This distinction recognizes that singleton-ness is a phenomenon often found in rural community districts. This does not imply that singleton educators do not exist in other demographic areas, such as suburban and urban communities. However, it allows for the transferability of findings across rural communities with similar

contextual rural descriptions. Further research soliciting data from singleton art educators in suburban and urban contexts would be a logical extension for this research to explore the similarities and differences in singleton experiences across community contexts.

Another delimitation of this study was the purposeful choice to focus specifically on the research questions and defining of characteristics of singleton-ness as the lens for analysis for this report. A phenomenological research design allowed participants to share their narrative experiences of teaching as singletons and explore the meaning of their experience working and teaching in a singleton teaching environment. Participants shared deep rich stories of their "singleton teaching world" which provided context and personal interpretations of their experiences. These stories included information and interpretations that went beyond the defining of characteristics of singleton-ness. The *skills* participants identified as meaningful to their experience is one example of "unexpected' information and was included in the analysis of this inquiry. However, other themes and patterns of experience were evident in the participants' stories. For example, participants described instances of not feeling valued as art educators, having difficulty recruiting and retaining students for art classes due to scheduling conflicts and limited time for course offerings. Participants described examples of experiences with online peer networks, availability of resources, and administrative understanding of content. Further exploration and analysis of these and other themes and patterns in participants' stories can add to the discourse of teacher professional development, art teacher needs and experiences, and the understanding of the singleton teaching environments in general.

Additionally, individual participant stories also provided insight into singleton art teaching in specific contexts, such as in a Native American community or Pre-K building. Individual stories shared by veteran teachers can lend insight into how teachers acclimated to

their rural singleton teaching environments over time. Conversely, stories shared by participants newly experiencing the singleton teaching environment can provide insight into this aspect of singleton-ness. By including the narrative stories at the end of this dissertation the reader can seek deeper understanding of the context and nuance of participants' experience. Further study of the topics provided, and potentially others, using a narrative research lens would allow for additional inquiry into the stories provided and the development of new understandings participants' lived experiences and add further insight and knowledge of singleton teaching to the field of educational research. It is the intent of this researcher to *re*-explore these stories for further analysis and meaning making.

Summary

This study explored the phenomenon of the rural singleton art teacher's experience to elicit characteristics of the singleton-teaching phenomenon, singleton-ness. These characteristics will inform planning initiatives to provide professional development programming that support singleton art(s) educators' unique needs. When exploring the nature of a phenomenon, a qualitative research methodology is appropriate to elicit rich, descriptive, contextual data (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Creswell, 2014; Creswell & Guetterman, 2019). A psychological constructivist paradigm (Bogdan & Bilken, 1998; Mertens, 2005) guides the methodology and methods of this study. A phenomenological design allows the researcher to document participants' perspectives of their experiences as singleton educators and then share their experiences with other educators who experience this phenomenon together identifying characteristics of singleton-ness. This process of shared meaning-making (Seidman, 2013) explored the needs and experiences of a group of rural singleton art educators and identified themes and characteristics associated with the singleton phenomenon. Additional exploration of the stories shared by participants is warranted to add to the analysis reported in this study.

Chapter 4: Characteristics, Skills, and Themes of Singleton-ness

Introduction

This chapter presents findings from seven participants' storied accounts of their rural singleton art teacher experience. The chapter begins by providing evidence of the rural and small school context of the study and brief introduction of the participants. The findings are then organized by the research questions pursued in this study. Question one asked: What are the characteristics of the phenomenon of the rural singleton art educator's experience? The characteristics that were identified are organized into a table (Table 2 Characteristics) indicating the characteristics each participant identified as part of her experience. Each characteristic is then supported by data in the form of quotes drawn directly from each participant's account of their experience.

The next section presents findings related to question two, which asked: What meaning do rural singleton art teachers make from their singleton teaching experiences? This section identifies skills and dispositions participants identified that have helped them navigate their singleton experience and are presented in a table entitled Skills for Success (Table 3 Skills for Success). These skills are then illustrated by data in the form of direct quotes from participants' stories of the meaning they made from their singleton experience and the associations they make with these essential skills.

The next section addresses question three, which asked: What shared meanings do a group of rural singleton art teachers make from their collective experience as lone content specialist in their school or district? In this section, findings from the panel discussion are presented. Participants gathered for a virtual panel discussion to discuss and review the collected data to explore the shared meaning of their experiences. Prior to the panel discussion participants

received a Google document with charts of the characteristics and skills identified from the interviews along with a list of the emerging themes from their experiences and list of their specific wants for future professional development initiatives. This final section presents the findings of the shared meanings arrived at during the panel discussion and includes participant direct quotes and descriptions of the discussion followed by a summary and introduction to chapters five and six.

The participant stories collected in this chapter include rich descriptive data that provide evidence, lived examples, for the identification of characteristics of the singleton phenomenon. Psychological constructivist theory states that individual learners construct meaning around a phenomenon based upon their prior knowledge and experience (Piaget, 1970). Patton (2015) refers to qualitative inquiry as a process by which individuals construct and attach meaning to their lived experiences. The findings of this study document the lived experiences of singleton art teachers across contexts (schools and districts) teaching in rural communities. Phenomenological research design values context and explores a phenomenon through the storied accounts of how participants experience it (Creswell, 2016). An inductive process of gathering stories from participant perspectives (Erickson, 1986) recognizes that each story offers its own unique point of view and through the sharing of these testimonies of singleton-ness one can gain a better understanding of this phenomenon.

Qualitative research values context. "To divorce the act, word, or gesture from its context is, for the qualitative researcher, to lose sight of significance" (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007, p. 5). For this reason, a narrative account of each participant's story, woven together with direct quotes and reflections is included as an appendix at the end of this dissertation research. The aggregate data presented in this chapter can be found in the narrative of each participant's story with context.

Participant quotes reported in this chapter are followed by the participant's pseudonym and page number where the quote can be referenced in their story found in Appendix C.

To know more about the phenomenon of the singleton art educator in the context of his/her school and community environment, rich, descriptive data (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Creswell, 2014) was collected using a three semi-structured (Seidman, 2013) interview protocol (Schuman, 1986; Seidman, 2006). The first interview focused on the participants' life history and established their personal and professional context as an art educator (See Appendix B for complete interview protocol and prompts). This interview was guided by three big ideas phrased as the following questions, how did your life's journey lead you to become an art educator in this community, what are the characteristics of your school teaching environment, and what supports and procedures are in place for your art instruction and students' learning? The big idea of the second interview was guided by the question, what is your singleton teaching experience? The third interview big idea was guided by the question, what does it mean to be a singleton art teacher? Additionally, participants completed a questionnaire prior to their first interview to activate their thinking about their teaching history and life experience. This information is organized by question 1-20 in Appendix A. Fieldnotes and observations of the classroom and school environment were recorded during the first, on-site, interview to add contextual detail to the participant's story.

Each interview was audio recorded and transcribed first electronically using Otter.ai and then reviewed by the researcher to ensure the transcription tool recorded the information accurately. Transcripts were then shared with the participant to review, and adjustments were made if requested. Member-checks allow respondents to review data and findings to ensure validity (Creswell, 2014; Merriam, 1998; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Yin, 2014). Additionally,

following an inductive (Creswell, 2003) process of meaning making (Patton, 2015), after each interview the transcript was reviewed by the researcher and emerging themes and questions were identified for clarification or elaboration during the next interview. Creswell notes that the interpretive/constructivist researcher relies upon "participants' views of the situation being studied" to "generate or inductively develop a theory or pattern of meanings" (2003, pp. 8-9). The interpretive/constructivist researcher must recognize the impact of his or her own background and experience as part of the interpretive process. Individuals create interpretations with the help of others and through this interaction, they (co)construct meaning (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). Enlisting a back and forth semi-structured (Seidman, 2013) interview style allows the participant to share their experiences and the researcher to ask questions for clarification and/or elaboration to ensure accuracy and make meaning from the participants responses. This process reflects the psychological constructivist theory that guides this study.

Additionally, meaning development can occur in the context of a social group where individuals in the group can "come to an agreement about the nature and warrant of a description of a phenomenon or its relationship to others" (Richardson, 2003, p. 3). This shared meaning(s) then becomes formal knowledge. A psychological constructivist paradigm allows for interpretation and shared knowledge making among a group of individuals who share a phenomenon, teaching as singletons, yet have different lived and teaching experiences and backgrounds. Following the interview stage of this study, participants were invited to take part in a virtual panel discussion. The panel discussion allowed participants to come together to discuss the characteristics they individually identified as part of their singleton experience. Together the group discussed, analyzed, and interpreted the findings, to identify an agreed upon list of characteristics describing the singleton phenomenon. Additionally, participants identified

personal skills and attributes that they developed or naturally possess that have helped them navigate their responsibilities as a singleton art educator in a small district. Finally, participants identified wants and needs that would provide support for their personal and professional development.

Rural Context Data

The following chart illustrates the districts and the criteria used to define the term *rural* for this study. Each district serves less than 1000 students Pre-K through twelfth grade, is identified as Rural 41 Fringe and/or Rural 42 Distant by the U.S. Census Bureau and is a Rural Schools Association member. Additional information provided includes the distribution of students and visual arts faculty. Participant Questionnaire Data for each participant can be found in Appendix A. This chart includes information such as participant's personal and teaching history, access to professional development in and outside of district, and support for teaching.

Table 1: School District Data

	School District Data			
Category/District	**Appleton**	**Cowtown**	**Eagleton**	**South**
Total Student Population (2022-23, data.nysed.gov)	739 Students K - 12	700 Students K - 12	303 Students K - 12	743 Students K - 12
Schools/Enrollment (2022-23, data.nysed.gov)	7 - 12 Grade Jr/Sr H.S. 323 Students K - 8 Grade Elementary 122 Students K - 6 Grades Elementary 294 Students	7 - 12 Grade Jr/Sr H.S. 334 Students K - 6 Grade Elementary 366 Students	6 - 12 Grade Jr/Sr H.S. 168 Students K - 5 Grade Elementary 135 Students	7 - 12 Grade Jr/Sr H.S. 328 Students 3 - 6 Grade Elementary 233 Students K - 2 Grade Elementary 182 Students
Art Faculty	4 Teachers Elementary Pre-k - 6 Elementary Pre-K - 8 Jr/Sr High School 7 - 9 Jr/Sr High school 9 - 12	3 Teachers Elementary Pre-K - 6 Jr/Sr H.S. 7 - 12 Jr/Sr H.S. 9 - 12	2 Teachers Elementary Pre-K - 5 Jr/Sr H.S. 6 - 12	3 Teachers Elementary Pre-K - 6 Jr/Sr H.S. 7 - 12 Jr/Sr H.S. 9 - 12
Census Classification (Census.gov)	Rural 41 Fringe Rural 42 Distant	Rural 42 Distant	Rural 42 Distant	Rural 41 Fringe
Population (Census.gov)	4,841 +/- 353	6,005 +/- 241	2,442 +/- 284	5,553 +/- 364
Rural Schools Association Membership	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

Participant Introductions

Seven rural singleton art educators from four districts were interviewed for this study. This section presents an introduction to each participant's singleton story and provides context for the data presented in the following sections. A more comprehensive account of each participant's story woven together in their own words can be found in Appendix C.

Nora (pseudonym) has been teaching at South Jr/Sr High School for thirteen years. She has taught art for grades seven through twelve and currently teaches two-dimensional arts in grades nine through twelve. South Junior-Senior High School is in a small village nestled in a rural community in Central New York. According to census data this district is identified as

Rural (41) Fringe. The district community population is 5,553 +/- 364 residents (Census.gov). The district serves 743 students across three school locations. There is one other high school art teacher whose room is in another building and an elementary art teacher who travels between the elementary and middle school buildings in the district.

Nora's singleton story reflects a passionate, resilient, outspoken advocate for art learning. Nora has worked hard to advocate for the art program at South Jr/Sr High School. She has spoken up when she needed to, for example, demanding equal value, equal pay, for art related duties that is in line with what other "core" teachers receive. She sought out resources on her own to supplement her classroom environment and promote student learning. She described times she had to reach out to colleagues, family, and friends outside of the school environment to find the support and guidance she needed when that support was not available in the district.

Nora described how she is not afraid to engage with other educators and parents in her district. She recognizes the value in developing these relationships and how this "visibility' is important to how people perceive the program and develop value for the art(s). Nora described ways she engaged students, both in her classes and those who are not able to take art classes, by including them in community service initiatives and school activities such as creating the set designs for the school drama program and the "Night of the Arts" program. She combined social studies learning, worldwide outreach, and artmaking by having students participate in the Memory Project, a program where students create portraits of children across the world experiencing social and economic challenges.

Nora has been able to foster interest among her colleagues about what goes on in her art classroom by engaging them in conversations and finding ways to collaborate towards common goals. She is enthusiastic about exploring new project ideas and often solicits recycled materials

from the staff and community members. Additionally, Nora maintains an arts newsletter and uses tools like the school web site and hall TV display monitors to share examples of student work. Over the years, Nora has built a "Night of the Arts" program that features both visual and performing arts. The community has come to anticipate and enjoy this event, furthering the visibility of what art(s) means to the students, school, and community culture.

Nora included in her description of skills she values in her singleton experience, art advocacy and self-advocacy, organization, love of learning, creative problem-solving, willingness to seek out support, outgoingness, collegiality, curiosity, being a self-starter, and relationship building – with students, colleagues, and community members. Nora identified that along with the autonomy she has as a singleton educator in a small rural district, she must assume responsibility. She likes to do things to the best of her ability and has had to learn to say no when the request is not related to her objectives as an art educator. She also recognized that "you don't know what you don't know" making it important to seek out opportunities for conversations and professional development learning with other art educators and artists.

Ultimately, Nora describes an "ideal world" where art educators could have a community network to share information about art opportunities for teachers and students. A network where teachers could explore and learn from one another. Additionally, Nora described a need for a mechanism to help connect teachers to resources such as posters, books, art examples, and information about places to take student to engage in art and artists who are willing to visit schools and do programming with students and teachers. In Nora's "ideal world" the art teacher should be both learner and teacher, expanding her perspective and developing her methods for teaching. For a singleton teacher, according to Nora, the daily tasks of supporting an art program on your own make it difficult to take on the responsibility of an initiative to develop

collaborations outside of your school community. As it is, Nora notes, the art educators in the district have very little opportunity to collaborate. Being a singleton art educator and sole advocate for your program is demanding.

Nora has worked hard over the years to get the art program to a place of school and community wide recognition. Additionally, the district recently demonstrated support for the growth of the program by adding another full-time middle school/ high school art teacher and implementing 3D sculpture and ceramics courses. Nora was excited and hopeful for the future of the program. She noted that there is always more to do, but this addition is a positive development for the program. Not only does it add to the opportunities for visual arts learning for the students, but it also provides new potential for collaboration and collegiality among these art educators.

Smith (pseudonym) has been teaching art in public schools for ten years. This is her second-year teaching at South Jr/Sr High School (pseudonym). Smith teaches seventh and eighth grade art, high school ceramics, and high school sculpture and has a study hall duty. South Junior-Senior High School is in a small village nestled in a rural community in Central New York. According to census data this district is identified as Rural (41) Fringe. The district community population is 5,553 +/- 364 residents (Census.gov). The district serves 743 students across three school locations. There is one other high school art teacher whose room is in another building and an elementary art teacher who travels between the elementary and middle school buildings in the district. Ms. Smith grew up in this rural community and graduated from South High School.

Smith's arts-filled childhood, life experience, and willingness to take on challenges led her back to the rural community in which she grew up to develop a 3D visual arts program at

South Jr/Sr High School. After exploring her interests and traveling, she chose to pursue a degree in art education and began her career teaching at a large urban district where she was the only 3D arts specialist in her building. After eight years at Denver Public School, Smith and her family moved back to Central N.Y. where Smith and her husband were raised. Smith accepted a position at the high school she attended as a teen and is now using her talents to navigate the challenges of being a singleton teacher and new member of the arts community.

Smith attributes her outgoingness, content knowledge, and willingness to jump in and take on new challenges with her ability to navigate her new position developing a 3D visual arts program at South Jr/Sr High School. Although Smith's classroom is in an outbuilding separate from the main campus building, she embraces the space as a starting point to build upon. Even with its limitations, she described the space as "magical" and is committed to encouraging students to seek out the opportunities 3D artmaking has to offer.

Although Smith had two other art teacher colleagues in the district, she is the only 3D arts specialist, and both of her colleagues teach in separate buildings. Smith identified herself as a singleton both at DPS and now at South Jr/Sr High School. In both experiences Smith described instances of isolation when it came to content support and professional development. DPS provided in-house professional development to its visual arts faculty creating a district network of educators. Despite this network, Smith still identified a lack of content specific professional development opportunities. In Denver she was able to make connections to the local arts organizations and even served as a presenter at arts workshops and conferences. Now that she is in a new state and teaching in a new position, she has been fervently seeking out art professional development in search of a local art educator network.

Smith identified a connection to other arts educators and professional development as both an opportunity to seek tools to develop her program and an opportunity to develop a network for personal and professional support for her teaching. She described these encounters as "it really feeds my soul" and she accredited it with promoting longevity in her career. Although her experiences so far with the local BOCES and CITI BOCES professional development offerings has been confusing due to recent changes in leadership, she is hopeful that these organizations will provide the resources and arts network she needs in the future.

Additionally, Smith described instances of isolation due to her classroom location and availability of time to interact with the other educators in her district. She attributed time, location, and colleague knowledge of her content specialty as hinderances to her opportunity to develop professional relationships within her district. Despite these challenges she maintained a positive outlook for these opportunities in the future and looks forward to when students, families, and colleagues "know her name" and look forward to the "traditions" she creates with her program.

Smiths identified the duplicity of autonomy. On the one hand it is wonderful to be able to explore lesson ideas and develop one's own curriculum, but on the other hand it is a large task to manage as a singleton. Smith looks forward to developing a network of arts educators to share ideas with and collaborate with to develop content specific curriculum and programming. She attributed her outgoing personality, organization, natural curiosity, and willingness to try new things with her ability to thrive as a singleton arts educator. She identified that outgoingness and confidence are both significant characteristics she identifies with success in the singleton arts classroom.

When asked what professional development support she would ask for, she described opportunities to bring in Artists as Teachers to her classroom to help enhance her knowledge base and provide enriched experiences for her students. She also suggested workshops to teach content specific skills and develop lessons and units that could be brought back to the classroom. She also requested opportunities to meet regularly with like content arts educators to develop a network of peers that could be an easily accessible resource for information and support. Finally, she stressed the importance of face time with colleagues to develop relationships and community.

Marie (pseudonym) has been teaching art in public school for thirty-two years. She has taught at Cowtown Elementary School for her entire teaching career. Cowtown Elementary School is in the town center of a small rural community. The district serves 700 students (data.nysed.gov) and has two buildings on campus. One, being the elementary building where Marie teaches, and the other being a Jr/Sr high school building located an athletic field's walking distance from the elementary building. Both buildings are on the same side of the road and connected by a driveway and sidewalks. According to census data, the district is identified as Rural (42) Distant with a community population of 6,005 +/- 241 residents (Census.gov). There are two other art teachers in the district, both teach in the Jr/Sr high school.

Although Marie would like to participate in personal art making and professional development with other area art teachers, it is difficult for her to fine the time and creative energy to add this to the many responsibilities of her role as singleton art teacher at Cowtown Elementary School. Over time, Marie has developed skills and routines to help her manage her busy work schedule. She has also committed time to interact daily with other 'special areas" teachers in her building. This lunch group supports one another personally and professionally,

sharing stories of their experiences in and out of the classroom. Marie admits that without this time of fellowship she would feel alone and isolated in her profession since there is very little time throughout the day to interact with classroom teachers. Additionally, she admits that her administrators and non-art colleagues have little understanding of her role as an arts teacher.

Marie does feel that the school district and community value arts learning in general, but art education is at times an afterthought, especially when it comes to scheduling. Marie has a very hectic schedule where different grade levels meet for different number of times throughout her week. This hectic schedule is due to fitting special area subject class times into the schedule around regular classroom instructional times. She stated that the schedule changes from year to year. This adds difficulty to her curriculum planning since the amount of instructional time she has with each grade level can also change. The biggest change came when they decreased the number of art teachers at the elementary school from two to one and student instructional time was cut in half and Marie became the lone art teacher. Marie explains that it would be difficult for a new teacher to step into her position since there have been many adaptations she has made over the years that have helped her manage her busy schedule and curricular and classroom management demands. Her ability to be organized, develop routines with the students and for herself, and her disposition of being easy-going and a self-starter have helped mitigate the challenges of being a singleton art educator.

Marie identified the following characteristics of her singleton-ness and skills for success. She has learned to say no, seeks out support and fellowship from her singleton colleagues, has learned to be a self-advocate and is organized. She described herself as being self-reliant and a self-starter. She is adaptable and a researcher who seeks out professional support online to

develop her knowledge and improve her curriculum. She noted that a singleton is a one-man-show and there are many demands to being the only content specialist in you building.

Marie identified several challenges that go along with her singleton experience. Being the only art teachers in her Pre-K- sixth grade building creates a demanding schedule. Being the only art teacher, and the infrequency of time she sees her students, makes it difficult to take time away from the classroom for professional development. She recalled how nice it was to have a content peer to share the load and bounce ideas off early in her career. She identified how challenging it was to not have a partner or team to work with. She also identified that she has had little help with curriculum development over the years and rarely meets with the other art teachers in the district. Additionally, Marie shared that there is little understanding of her content specialty among her colleagues and administration. She identifies that because she is the only one and because she does not have content support, she tends to stay in her comfort zone when it comes to curriculum development.

Marie enjoys the year-to-year variety teaching offers and the relationships she can foster with her students and watching them develop artistically over the years she has been their teacher. She would like to be a part of a local network of art educators and be able to share ideas and local resources. She enjoys learning about other artists and artforms and described the value of having PD opportunities to meet and learn from such artists. She recognizes the value of the variety such experiences would bring to her classroom and students. She would like the opportunity to engage in these experiences but is unsure how that could be managed between the shortage of substitute teachers, lack of substitutes that are art content specialists, and her limited and hectic schedule. She identified how difficult it is for a lone content specialist, who only sees her students for forty minutes once every three to four days, to leave the classroom to attend PD

offerings. She did, however, recognize that without her early experiences with a co-teacher and getting some skills "under her belt" before becoming a singleton at Cowtown, she would have struggled with the demands of singleton teaching. It would have been "overwhelming" to her, and she fears it will be overwhelming for the next art teacher who takes her place when she retires if the necessary adjustments and supports are not put into place.

Despite the challenges and many twists and turns over the years, Marie described how much she enjoys the autonomy of being a singleton. She enjoys creating her lessons and seeing the growth in her students' abilities over time. She noted that this was the biggest pro of singleton-ness and working in a small district; getting to build relationships with the students and taking pride and "feeling special" when the students' work is recognized and complemented by her colleagues and the community.

Clover (pseudonym) has been teaching art in public schools for twenty-five years. She has taught visual arts at Cowtown Central Schools (pseudonym) for twenty-four years. Clover began her career at Cowtown teaching at the kindergarten through sixth grade elementary school for seven years before being transferred to Cowtown's Junior/Senior High School. For her first seven years, Clover worked with another elementary art teacher, Marie, sharing the course load in a K-6 building. Each teacher taught different sections of each grade level. Clover now teaches at the Jr/Sr high school where she is responsible for 10-week rotations of seventh grade and eighth grade art, one section of Studio Art, one section of Creative Crafts (a Studio Art alternative), and Ceramics I, II, and III, each 20-week courses. Additionally, Clover has a homeroom duty and study hall duty, one preparation period and a thirty-minute lunch break.

The Cowtown district serves 700 students (data.nysed.gov) and has two buildings on campus. One, being the elementary building where Marie teaches, and the other being a Jr/Sr

high school building located an athletic field's walking distance from the elementary building. Both buildings are on the same side of the road and connected by a driveway and sidewalks. According to census data, the district is identified as Rural (42) Distant with a community population of 6,005 +/- 241 residents (Census.gov). There are two other art teachers in the district, one teaches 9-12 grade advanced art courses in the same building next door to Clover and the other teaches art grades Pre-K through six in the elementary building.

Clover grew up in a community larger than Cowtown. Being in a larger school she was exposed to a variety of art courses. Although she was neither encouraged nor discouraged to pursue art after graduation, in high school she identified that she enjoyed art and that it was "something I am good at". Clover also noted that she had positive role models in her high school experience such as her coaches and a beloved history teacher. Her path following high school graduation allowed her to explore different art majors in college and work opportunities and a trip to Europe solidified her desire to pursue Art Education as a career.

Clover's additional teaching responsibilities and duties include being department chair, club advisor, coach, and study hall and homeroom teacher. Art related responsibilities include budgeting and ordering of materials, maintaining equipment, curriculum development, grading, preparing for art displays and shows, classroom management, organizing and planning art field trips, and community outreach to name a few.

Clover identified time, curriculum demands, many tasks and teaching responsibilities related to art learning and curriculum development and display, school and community outreach demands, and scheduling limitations as some of the challenges of being a singleton art teacher in a small rural district. She also identified the following needs: singleton friendly professional development, appropriate teaching workspace and classroom set-up, collegial interaction with art

colleagues, common planning time with art colleagues, and access to art resources such as visiting artists, and art focused professional development.

In terms of school and community support, Clover described instances of feeling both supported and not supported by her school administration and community. In general, Clover described Cowtown as a supportive school and community. Throughout her career Clover experienced instances when the district and community supported the art program and Clover's role as art educator. Specifically, when Clover moved to the Jr/Sr high school the district bought a kiln and slab roller for her to start a ceramic program. Community organizations and business have reached out to the art department to offer space to display student work and create special community focused art exhibits.

When discussing support in terms of curriculum and program development, Clover identified that the district has mostly left this work for Clover to manage on her own. Although Clover has had some assistance with curriculum from her content peers over the years, when it came to restructuring of the seventh and eighth grade courses, new course development, and a recent district wide curriculum alignment initiative, Clover has been essentially on her own to research and align the courses she teaches. Additionally, a substitute teacher shortage and the anxiety of leaving the classroom in the hands of a non-art substitute teacher or school colleague make it difficult for Clover to ask for time off to attend professional development offerings. She expressed concerns both with being denied the time due to the sub situation and with the loss of work time for her students when she is away.

Characteristics and skills Clover identified as part of her singleton experience include isolation, flexibility, perseverance, love of learning, sense of humor, organization, assertiveness,

gritty, intelligent, problem-solving, critical thinking, Jack of all trades, and an ability do it yourself.

Advantages Clover described as part of her singleton teaching experience, include the feeling of enthusiasm and partnership she felt those first seven years at the elementary school. When asked to make the choice to move to the Jr/Sr high school, Clover had this experience to lean on as she made her transition into a new position. She commented that at first, she was unhappy with being forced to change, but looking back identified that change as "a blessing I didn't know I needed at the time." Clover described enjoying the freedom to develop her lessons and courses. She described her experience at Cowtown as "feeling like home" and her colleagues as "feeling like a family". She remarked on how she can see the students grow over the years and how she feels pride in being a part of their experience. Ultimately, she stated, "I feel like I'm where I'm supposed to be."

Michael (pseudonym) is an elementary visual arts teacher at Eagleton Central School District (pseudonym) which serves 303 students in grades kindergarten through twelfth grade (data.nysed.gov). Eagleton Central School is in the rural town of Eagleton (pseudonym) and is a Pre-K through twelve building with a separate structure that houses the music department. Michael has taught elementary art at Eagleton for eleven years. According to census data, Eagleton School District is identified as Rural (42) Distant with a community population of 2,442 +/- 284 residents (Census.gov). There is one other visual arts teacher in the district who teaches seven through twelfth grade and has been teaching in the district for thirty-four years. The district's K-12 building is organized to house the Jr/Sr high students separate from the elementary students. The Jr/Sr high art teacher's room is located on the second floor away from Michael's first floor classroom.

Michael's eleven years at Eagleton Central School have been full of changes. Changes in room assignments. Changes in scheduling and curricular demands. Changes in administration and support for arts learning and her role as a singleton art teacher. Despite these changes, Michael described her dedication to reflecting upon and improving her teaching and students' art learning experiences. Michael's philosophy of art education supports choice-based learning in her classroom. Although she admits it has been challenging in a small community environment to move her curriculum towards choice learning, she continues to advocate for what she believes is best for her students. She identified that not everyone "understands" what happens in an art classroom or what creativity looks like.

Michael has a master's degree in curriculum and is very conscientious when it comes to aligning her program to the *new* New York State Visual Arts Standards and advocating for the district to participate in the Individual Art Assessment Pathway (IAAP). When she began at Eagleton, the district did not have any elementary art resources to support her lesson development and teaching. Through her own research and advocacy, she gathered resources and attended professional development training to help develop a viable elementary art curriculum. Michael's story included moments of frustration when she did not feel supported or valued by her colleagues and administration. It also included examples of how she and her singleton colleagues support one another as best they can with their busy work schedules.

Michael identified several characteristics as part of her singleton experience. She described instances of feeling like a "one-man-show" and not having anyone to "bounce ideas off from." She explained that being a singleton means that she has had to advocate for herself and her students for materials, space, resources, curriculum, professional development, and time. She identified that not all her colleagues and administrators have had a good working

understanding of the art curriculum and that at times she has had to defend her professional choices for her students' learning. Michael feels the pressure of keeping her knowledge and her program up to date with the initiatives for the arts put forth by the state. She would like to move the district arts program towards providing students the opportunity to participate in IAAP, but her veteran arts colleagues do not share her enthusiasm and progress with her new administration is slow.

Michael has found support in BOCES arts professional development offerings, but it is difficult to take time away from her classroom because of a sub shortage and the instruction and work time her students lose when she is away. Michael loves the "freedom" of creating "custom curriculum" for her students but identified that this is a plus and a minus. Creating your own curriculum and having no one to "bounce ideas off of" leaves Michael, at times, worried about if she is "overthinking it" and making more work for herself.

When asked what she would ask for as a singleton educator she stated she would like access to a network of teachers, more local, who could support one another as arts educators. She has attended such a community as part of MOBOCES, but she noted that it is too far away, and she is not able to attend many of the PD offerings. She would like common planning time for her and her art(s) colleagues so they could create a more cohesive support structure in her district. She would also like her colleagues and administration to have a better understanding of arts learning.

Michael described how much she loves her small school district and this tight knit community. She participates in many extra-curricular activities such as being the set and costume designer for their drama department and teaching afterschool and summers art programs. She is actively invested in growing and improving her art program and has demonstrated this in the

efforts she has made on behalf of the district to learn about the new arts standards and IAAP initiative.

Mrs. Art (pseudonym) served as an art teacher in public school for thirty-five years. She retired from Appleton Central School District (pseudonym) in upstate New York in 2022, after teaching visual arts there for twenty-eight years. For most of her career, Mrs. Art taught grades nine through twelve high school art levels one through five as a singleton teacher in her district. Appleton Jr/Sr High School serves 341 students in grades seven through twelve (data.nysed.gov). A second visual arts teacher who primarily teaches middle school seventh and eighth grade visual arts is also assigned to this school building. According to census data, the community of Appleton is identified as Rural (41) Fringe and Rural (42) Distant (Census.gov). Appleton has a population of 4,842 +/- 353 residents (Census.gov.). The Appleton Central School District is comprised of a Pre-K through sixth grade elementary school, a middle/junior/senior high school, and a secondary (alternative) high school. The district, geographically, includes an American Indian Nation Community which has its own Pre-K through eighth grade school.

Mrs. Art grew up in a rural community like Appleton with rolling hills and farm country. Her school district was spread out and served a population twice the size of Appleton. Like Appleton her home district was located near an urban center. She reported that the district population was diverse and the approach to teaching and learning progressive.

Mrs. Art described her parents as being supportive of her creativity. Her mom was a music teacher and her father an electrician. She noted that her "teaching gene" came from her mother's side of the family and her skills with tools and making came from her father. She credits her art teachers for encouraging her talents and inspiring her to pursue art and teaching.

Following this example, Mrs. Art pursued art in college and developed her own art making skills before continuing on to earn her teaching degree. She began her career in a district similar to Appleton then spent the rest of her teaching career serving as a Jr/Sr high school visual arts teacher at Appleton.

Early in her career, Mrs. Art described having a fear of asking for help and guidance, thinking that this might give the impression that she was somehow incompetent or unknowledgeable. She described carefully observing art colleagues to learn technique and presentation. She researched extensively to gain information and resources for her classroom. She noted that although the district at one time had a curriculum coordinator for many years, she was tasked with developing curriculum on her own. When the district did provide this assistance with curriculum development, she found this resource to be extremely helpful. Time, structure, access to examples, and guidance all made this process "so easy" with this support.

Mrs. Art described time, being responsible for materials, budgeting, grading, technology, promoting your program, advocacy, lesson preparation and curriculum planning, research, access to professional development outside of school, and misconceptions about what art teachers do as being challenges of her job. In addition, she identified that being a singleton means that you deal with these challenges essentially on your own, making your job at times lonely and frustrating. Among the personal skills she identified were self-motivation, inquisitiveness, creativity, resourcefulness, hardworking and observant. Skills she identified she had developed as a singleton included organization, resiliency, self-advocacy, self-motivation, problem-solving, and research and life-long learning.

Mrs. Art identified advantages to working in a small community as being able to get to know your students and getting the opportunity to see them grow over the years. She noted that

the Appleton community was more connected than the community where she grew up sharing in local celebrations and customs. She enjoyed the freedom that came with being a singleton. She could choose her own lessons and follow her own inspiration for teaching and engaging her students. Although she did not have another teacher who specifically taught the same content as her, she identified that working in a small building created other structural kinds of commonalities such as access to resources and the school facilities. As time passed, Mrs. Art developed her reputation and the reputation of the art program by displaying student work and demonstrating the standard of achievement and skills she was teaching in the art room. She also described instances of finding other ways to connect to colleagues, outside of art, socially and professionally through conversations about student needs and family.

Finally, Mrs. Art provided what she identified as wants and needs for singleton art teachers. She stated that although she and her art colleagues at Appleton had assigned PLC time, these meetings did not allow time for community building among this group. She identified time where these content peers could share examples of what was happening in their classrooms and collaborate as a district wide team could make these educators feel less isolated. She expressed a need for a central source for communication of information regarding opportunities for art professional development and professional development that presented lessons and materials that are financially practical in a classroom setting. She identified that opportunities for arts educators within and across districts to gather and have in-person conversations about what they are doing in their classrooms and share lesson exemplars and resources would help offset the isolation of singleton-ness and create community.

Nina (pseudonym) is an elementary art teacher in the Appleton Central School District (pseudonym) in upstate New York. She has been teaching in the district for two years. Nina

teaches visual arts to students in grades Pre-K through eighth grade at the American Indian Nation School (AINS, pseudonym) which is part of the Appleton Central School District. She is the only art teacher in her building. The AIN school is located approximately eight miles to the south of the district's main campus and second elementary school and approximately three miles outside of an urban center to the north. The school building is a single structure housing facilities for grades Pre-K through eighth grade and is in the AIN village center. According to census data, the community of Appleton Central School District is identified as Rural (41) Fringe and Rural (42) Distant (Census.gov). The 2022-23 AIN school enrollment was 122 students (data.nysed.gov). The Appleton Central School main campus, second elementary school and alternative high school are all located in the town of Appleton. Appleton has a population of 4,842 +/- 353 residents (Census.gov.). The district's total enrollment is 739 students (data.nysed.gov).

Nina stated,

> I have a lot of passion for this. I have a lot. I can't imagine myself doing anything else. No matter how hard I've got it, I still wouldn't want to do anything else. I absolutely love this with like, every fiber of my being, you know, I love being not only part of art, but I love being part of AINS and the Appleton District. I think if I didn't care, I wouldn't do it. I wouldn't have so much to say.

Nina's life history has helped her navigate transitioning into this new learning environment and embrace the challenges of being a singleton art teacher in a Native American community. She recognized that in her younger, novice years as an art teacher she would not have been as prepared for the challenges of being in an environment that requires you to be self-sufficient and confident enough to seek out help and training on your own. She explained, "I feel

like if I weren't who I am now, I would struggle a lot more, because I don't mind going in, finding a training, going to a training by myself, hopping on and figuring something out, those sorts of like, puzzle pieces don't affect me, I don't mind them. But if you were to look at me, fifteen years ago, twenty years ago, I probably would have been like, oh, I'm not going to that big training all by myself. Experience can make you who you are."

Nina's personal experiences outside of the school environment and her active participation in the art community as a practicing artist contribute to her resiliency and determination to be a successful teacher at AIN school. She is a life-long learner and seeks out information and collaboration wherever she can to supplement her lessons and create engaging and culturally meaningful experiences for her students. Her teaching philosophy is student centered and focuses on providing students with the opportunity to have "voice" through their art creation.

Nina identified several characteristics associated with her singleton experience including motivation, control, autonomy, self-sufficiency, independence, empowering but lonely, flexibility, ability to communicate, visible, vulnerable, and being a life-long learner and independent researcher. She described instances of feeling both supported and unsupported by her colleagues, community, and administration. She described a school environment where the climate and expectation for teachers is "all-hands-on-deck." She shares examples of times when this environment was frustrating because she was pulled from her responsibilities as an art educator or repeatedly interrupted during instruction because boundaries and value for her art teaching/student learning are not yet established. She also described how close knit and caring this environment can be and provided examples of relationships she has built with students and parents. Ultimately, she expressed that she prefers the small school environment over her

experiences in larger city schools because she values the relationships she can create in this environment and "being seen."

Nina described singleness as being lonely and empowering. She noted that autonomy comes with responsibility and a willingness to be accountable for your choices and actions. Although the district supports an art content PLC that meets every other week, Nina expressed a need for more communication and support with curriculum development, processes, and content learning. She identified a "want" for opportunities to gain support in these areas through focused, hands-on training in art content and technical support for issues such as kiln repair and maintenance.

Question 1: What are the characteristics of the phenomenon of the rural singleton art educator's experience?

Research question one, what are the characteristics of the phenomenon of the rural singleton art educator's experience, is the focus of the findings presented in this section. Over the course of three interviews participants were asked to reflect upon their singleton teaching experiences and identify characteristics that they associate with singleton-ness. The following chart identifies the characteristics each participant explicitly described as part of their experience. The left column of the chart indicates the characteristics identified and the participant pseudonyms are indicated at the top of the chart. The X indicates participants who explicitly identified this characteristic as part of their experience during their interviews. Contextual descriptions of the meaning of each characteristic are included in the following paragraphs as findings supported by direct quotes from the participants.

Table 2: Characteristics

Characteristics	Nora South	Smith South	Marie Cowtown	Clover Cowtown	Michael Eagleton	Mrs. Art Appleton	Nina Appleton
Autonomy ~ Pro Freedom	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Autonomy ~ Con Responsibility	X	X			X	X	X
Only One ~ Job Demands	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Only One ~ Content Specialist	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Only One ~ Art Influence		X	X		X	X	
Lonely/Isolated	X	X	X	X	X		X
No Team/Bounce Ideas/Share Content	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Curriculum ~ Develop your own	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Busy Schedule	X	X	X	X		X	
Multilevel Classes	X			X		X	
Little Time for Interactions with others	X	X	X	X	X	X	
No Common Planning Time	X	X		X	X		
Self-Doubt	X	X	X	X	X	X	
Seek Outside Supports	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Hard to Leave	X		X	X	X		
Afterthought for PD	X		X	X	X		
Lack of Support for Behaviors/No TA Support					X		
Seen as Special			X				X

Autonomy

Participants identified both advantages and disadvantages of autonomy. Nora stated, "I can make the lessons and the department work the way I want it to work, but the cons are that you're lacking people to bounce ideas off and have that collective brainstorming or people that you can turn to for advice when you're having difficulty with the situation" (Nora, p. 267). Smith stated, "I feel like it's nice. Because it's, you know, you can kind of make your own world. And I feel like the standards are open ended enough that you can, you know, kind of create your own content." And "Well, for some people, it's a good thing. For others, it's a bad thing. But you don't always have someone checking in on you, because you're the only person doing what you do" (Smith, p. 294). Marie commented, "In a way, I think a positive about it (singleton-ness) is that I can go at my own pace. I am not worrying about, oh, they're finishing that, so my kids need to finish that. So, that is a positive but besides that, that is probably the only positive I can think of as being the only one teaching art" (Marie, p. 311). Clover stated, "Sometimes it's a pro

to me not a con that I get to develop my own path or direction with my choices, because the vehicle I take, as long as I'm hitting the standards, it's a little bit easier. Or it's a little liberal" (Clover, p. 331). Michael stated,

> "What's unique to a singleton is that we're kind of like a one man show, we have to make decisions based on, you know, our own professional opinion, sometimes. Without feedback from others, we have to trust ourselves to kind of be the representative of our program. We don't have anything to compare to. Which is unique. And I love that piece, that like I have complete freedom to do my own curriculum and the art standards in New York State aren't saying, you know, you have to teach two-point perspective. So, that piece is unique. But also on the flip side, and it's like, sometimes I wish I did have somebody telling me, this is what you need to teach, because I guess, just that assurance that my program is strong and rigorous. And things like that" (Michael, p. 357).

Mrs. Art stated,

> "Well, I felt like I had a lot of independence. I felt like I had to be very self-sufficient and motivated, and a problem solver. There wasn't, my being a single person, there's no other competition, which can be a very positive freeing experience. So that you have free rein, it comes to my mind. Oh, gosh, the main thing is that creative freedom. To have no one there to tell you no. Not that I was a risk taker. But when you get this idea that you're going to do totems, and we're going to do them out of clay, and we're going to have teams and you just kind of run with these ideas. So that creative freedom was just really wonderful, for me. I did not find a really negative about having to work and not answer to anyone" (Mrs. Art, p. 374).

Nina reflected, "And that's when I say things like, we're all in our own little bubble. It's so comfortable to just kind of like, hey, I'm here. I don't have to answer anybody, but me, really, when it comes to this. And that is, I have to say, that's a pro because it's, you know, when you answer to no one, but you also have no one to blame but you" (Nina, p. 404).

Only One ~ Job Demands, Content Specialist, Art Influence

Participants described a variety of characteristics of being the only one. Job demands, being the only content specialist, and art influence surfaced as significant to their stories. Nora explained,

It is that you very much feel that you are stuck doing everything. Like it's not like, say you were working at a school where you were one of, like, four art teachers in that building. As a department, one person could be like, okay, I'm gonna be the person who sends the pictures to the newsletter and another person be like alright I'm gonna do this other promotional thing, another person could say alright, I'm gonna spearhead this stuff for the art show. There's no division of labor when you're a singleton. You're doing everything and there's no way around it" (Nora, p. 273).

Smith explained her singleton job demands this way,

Well, there's so much to do all the time. Like, I work through my lunch. Like, I don't eat lunch in the staff room. You know, I don't even know if they do, because I've never been over there during lunch period; actually. So, I'm super isolated, but there's so much to do to manage an arts classroom, it's not only curriculum, but it's movement around the space, its stations, it's materials, and it's supplies. And that all has to get done, you know, when you teach five different, like, crazy hands-on courses. You know, it takes a lot of time to have all those stations set up and it, you know, run smoothly. So, I don't have time to go out and socialize. And yeah, I don't know anyone. Like, it's too hard. And I don't know, I don't know if that's particular to being a singleton teacher. I think that's just being an art teacher. And it's like one of those things that always gets overlooked, right, like, we're the ones that do the job of a million things, art shows, display cases, all the things" (Smith, p. 295).

Smith added this description of being the only 3D content specialist and wanting to provide "options" for her students. "At a small school to be able to have those options would be so beneficial for the students. But, because that is not my comfort zone, and no one is pushing me out of it, I'm gonna tread lightly. You know, I'm gonna, ah, if the opportunity was there, sure" (Smith, p. 292)! Marie described it this way, "You know, the students are getting my experiences, my ideas, but, you know, in art, especially, there's so many ways you can accomplish a learning standard that I feel like that is missing, that they're not getting several different ways of accomplishing it. They're just getting one way." She concluded that, "as a singleton is you're just relying on yourself" (Marie, p. 309). She added, "I would say, being here now, being the art expert in the school, so anything, whether it's somebody, a teacher comes to you with a personal art question, something they're doing in the classroom, not necessarily even what you're doing in art, but you become the go to person to ask any art question, which is totally

fine. Except, I'm only one person, I don't know, like, have experiences for everything" (Marie, p. 309). Clover described the demands of her singleton experience, "So, like, the day, it can be utter chaos, you learn to work in that environment. We don't have, I don't, we're not just one teacher that teaches sixth, seven, eighth (grade) you know, and switches every 10 weeks. But some of those courses do switch for me. I have my 20-week classes, I have my 10-week classes, and I have my 40-week classes. And then, you know, thinking about the other logistics, you order for all that, you have to pay attention to your numbers, you have to pay attention to marking periods. And some of my headaches aren't even the same as other teachers' headaches" (Clover, p. 330).

Michael identified, "Yeah, I think that's really the Achilles heel, is just taking all of it on by yourself and not being able to share that weight with anybody else" (Michael, p. 358). She added, "What's unique to a singleton is that we're kind of like a one man show, we have to make decisions based on, you know, our own professional opinion, sometimes. Without feedback from others, we have to trust ourselves to kind of be the representative of our program. We don't have anything to compare to" (Michael, p. 357).

Mrs. Art described her job demands this way, "I have experienced an average of five preps per year, that's an average. Not every instructor has that many preps. So that could be seen as a very negative thing. I saw it as a positive, in that I had the opportunity to instruct many different things, many different media. Another characteristic would be long hours, long hours required outside of your regular school day to satisfactorily prepare everything, prepare your lessons, complete your grading, to work, completing work for PLCs, etc. to implement new and ongoing projects, but you're never bored" (Mrs. Art, p. 376). She added, "Well, the singleton experience is definitely unique, you alone, are responsible for creating, for implementing, critiquing, and reflecting on your own content, as well as the success of the lessons. There's

really… I did not have a lot of feedback that I felt was really critical and constructive, that truly identified good or bad features of the lesson, and its implementation" (Mrs. Art, p. 376). Nina described being "the only one" this way, "It feels busier because you have no(one), not only is it a little lonely, you get stressed out because you are the point of contact, and the only one that can do anything about it" (Nina, p. 399).

Lonely/Isolated/No Team

Participants described loneliness/isolation and lack of a team as characteristics of their singleton experience. "When we are doing curriculum stuff for the state or when I'm trying to develop new lessons and I'm literally on my own…I did the best as I could, but I also frequently, in years when things were busier and I was really on my own, I found myself really thinking I really wish I had a partner to work with" and "people to turn to for advice when you're having difficulty with a situation" (Nora, p. 373). Smith described, "Singleton and being in this little building, I do not collaborate that much. Um, I share a wall with one teacher, and we'll talk, we say hi in the morning and sometimes one of us will have an issue and be like, I have to talk through something. That's been really nice. But this little building, I wish I could stand in the hall more and just like, I need adult interaction, you know" (Smith, p. 288). Smith recalled when she worked at another, larger, district where she enjoyed having other arts teachers in her building, "You know... there was somebody you could decompress with at the end of the day. If you go and complain to a math teacher, they don't understand. Our classrooms are just so different, so it is nice to have that type of alignment in content a little bit. Where you can get, you know, your ups and downs are similar at least" (Smith, p. 283). "It would be nice to have some feedback or time to talk through things or do some cognitive coaching with people" (Smith, p. 296).

For Marie location has played a role in how isolated she has been, she explained, "Yes, it was a busier location with the older kids upstairs. Um, I kinda felt a little more in the mix upstairs. However, I kinda like that down here is out of the mix because I feel like I can keep my door open, you know, we are not being too loud and disturbing to the other classes. There are pros and cons for both areas. The room upstairs was a better art room, better space, bigger, more storage" (Marie, p. 301). She described, "Yes, so I'd say the special area team, music, library, (art) we all have lunch time together, so we get together. We do discuss a lot of school related things at that time. So that has been very nice to have a common lunch time so we can actually meet with each other. We share the same classes (students) we share the same schedule, so it is nice too, it helps to not feel so isolated" (Marie, p. 308). Early in her career Marie described the advantages of having a partner teacher and mentor, "I think, luckily for me. Once I became the sole art teacher, I already had experience. It was very helpful when I first started teaching to have someone else there. An experienced person to ask questions to, a mentor, just even for procedures and things like that" (Marie, p. 304). Clover described her experiences,

> If you don't have it, you don't miss it in a way. And my career has never, I did a year and a half in Clinton. And it was the same setting, there was just me K-6, there might have been a part time teacher and then a high school teacher. So, I never met with them. My first year and a half, I was very isolated. And just really leaning on my methods classes from SU and my workshops, and I was building the complete plane while I was flying it. And I think we all do that. I think you just have a few tools in your toolbox. You have a few projects in your tool belt, and you hopefully got some good experience management wise in your placements to know some of the fires, how to put them out" (Clover, p. 332).

Clover continued, I do have a sense of partner teacher, but singleton wise, I don't know, like for clay, I am the only one who teaches that course. I seek out things online, I look at other teachers' work, what they're doing in introductory classes. I don't know as though I know a different way. I've never had a group to work with. I don't know as

though I really could articulate (these) challenges. Not having the sounding board has probably been the hardest part" (Clover, pp. 312-313). Michael stated, "I guess it's kind of a lonely experience. Just not having that camaraderie. Even though the high school art teacher's upstairs, we never see each other. We don't have common time very often. It's very casual, like, friendly. But like I kind of talked about, we don't have a team. A strong sense of an arts team. Because we all have such different schedules. The music department is across the parking lot. So that makes it even more difficult to work with them. Yeah, so just say it's just a lot of (sighs) it just kind of solo a lot" (Michael, p. 356). Mrs. Art stated, "I had very limited in person collaboration with peers and district art teachers" (Mrs. Art, p. 376). She also stated, "I think the level of support can make the singleton instructor feel included in the school. You can feel accepted by your colleagues and appreciated, or you can feel the opposite, unappreciated, you can feel isolated. And you can also fear for your job security." When asked how this applied to her experience she responded, "I think I felt all of those at different points in my career" (Mrs. Art, p. 378).

Nina stated, "I am alone, alone. There are no other rooms down here. I'm the only one. Across the hall is the IT guy, but they're from BOCES. And then over there is our food pantry. So, that's about it. They drop their kids off or if they come down, I mean, my room's typically doors open. People are shuffling in and out. So, I see more people in that realm than I do anything else. And I try to make myself accessible and out the hallway too, so I'm not forgotten (Laughs)" (Nina, p. 393). She also stated, "And very luckily, we have the PLC with every other week meetings with the art department. So, I think that in all honesty, Appleton does it extremely well. When I was at the city school district, I was

the middle school teacher. And then there was an elementary teacher and we actually saw each other one time in one whole school year. So that was just as, I think, lonely as not having anybody there at all" (Nina, pp. 394-395). Nina described being a new teacher, "So when I worked in other districts, especially the city school district, there was a lot more of, there was a stronger bond between the art teachers, even if you only saw them once a year at the district, all city art show, there was, you know, we communicated and talked and stayed on top of each other's you know, work and stuff like that. Even though the district is massive. I think because everyone here is a singleton art teacher. That component of communication is kind of like feathered away or whispered away or whatever. And it's been difficult. Like, I feel like I'm the one pushing a lot to be like, hey, let's do something together. Hey, let's figure this out. Hey, you know, let's, let's try to do this together. And a lot of times, it's, you know, teachers going oh, okay. Because they haven't had to do it in a long time" (Nina, p. 402).

Curriculum Demands

Participants also described curriculum responsibilities as a characteristic of their singleton experience. Nora stated, "When we are doing curriculum stuff for the state or when I'm trying to develop new lessons and I'm literally on my own" (Nora, p. 273). Smith noted, "I became a first-year teacher all over again. So that was a new experience for me. The demographics are much different. And so, yeah, I have done a lot of reflection on my units. Of like, OK, I need to change this, or I need to speed it up or I don't need to go in depth here" (Smith, p. 284). Marie explained,

> When I first started here, there were two art teachers here (at the elementary level) and then there was one. So, I really can tell the difference between having somebody to be supportive and together (with) and with curriculum, grading,

even anything…bounce ideas… and then to have nobody to do that with. Its, its, I have had both so… even though I have only been at this district I have (noticed) there's a big difference." She continued, "…when it comes to actually teaching or standards, I have no one else to, you know, really say like, what do you think does this fit that? Or, you know, I have to kind of fly blind sometimes, as far as, you know, am I doing this the right way (Marie, p. 305)?

Clover provided this example of when she changed buildings and grade levels,

> There was not a lot of it (curriculum materials). It was almost a sink or swim, especially with Studio Art. There are so many ways to achieve our standards, so you ended up kind of putting down your own pavers, for your path. So, I would not say there was one iota of any district catalog or assessment tool that was ever given to me or rubric. That all came from exemplars I'd either got in my grad courses, or I'd gotten at professional development that I went to. I did attend the New York State Art Teachers Association (NYSATA) workshop conferences where they were working on the big (art)curriculum binder. So, I remember using that. That was a huge tool for me (Clover, p. 323).

Michael described her experience, "There was nothing. There was no binder, there was no (new) New York State Standards to reference, there wasn't much" (Michael, p. 345). She added,

> When the standards came out for a couple years, I blew it up and I just kept it on my desk, like one of those big calendar maps. So, it was right under my laptop, so every time (I can look at it) and that's how I taught myself the standards. I just, okay, my second graders are coming in, this is what we're doing, you know, how, how am I gonna relate this to the new standards and kind of was able to lose some pieces that were totally not meeting the standards and, and then add, add some things that that were more meaningful (Michael, p. 345).

Mrs. Art had a different experience when her district hired a curriculum coordinator.

> Well, the district has a written kindergarten through twelve curriculums, which the instructors have played a key role in developing, and it follows the new New York State Standards for the Arts. We originally, at the high school level, saw that the New York State Arts Standards were being rewritten. And in doing research, we discovered that at the national level, they had rewritten the standards well

before New York State. We adapted and adopted the National Standards before the new N. Y. S. Arts Standards were in place. So, we felt very prepared when we had to tackle and add in the new N. Y. S. Arts Standards and adapt and adopt those. We had a curriculum coordinator who worked with us to guide us through that process. It was placed online, so it was an online resource that everyone could work on independently if need be. There were assigned curriculum tasks and deadlines for developing up and completing portions of the curriculum. And so, we would, indeed have to also work on our own time to make sure that those deadlines were met (Mrs. Art, p. 368).

Mrs. Art continued, "It was left to the teachers to develop their own personal interpretation of that curriculum. There were no set required lessons that were dictated to be delivered" (Mrs. Art, p. 369). Nina, who teaches in the same district as Mrs. Art at the American Indian Nation School (pseudonym) described her experience, "So, I'm kind of building a curriculum on my own and trying to be aware of a culture that I'm not a part of. And a history that I'm not a part of. So, trying to understand those, and my place in it without being privileged in that way. And then following, you know, the elements of art and the basic skills that the children need" (Nina, p. 391). She continued, "I would have liked if our program had more lineage. But that's just me. The city school district, in my opinion did it right. All four teachers needed to teach these couple of artists in any way that you (the teachers) want to or use these couple of mediums in any way you want to. So, by the time all these kids filtered out into all the different high schools, they all had this basic knowledge. Whereas I look at the other art teacher in the elementary school, in the middle school, and I go, did you teach this? And they said no. I'm like, should we teach this? And they said, I don't know. I'm like, I feel like we should" (Nina, p. 392).

Busy Schedule/Little Time for Interactions

Participants reported busy schedules as being a characteristic of singleton-ness. Secondary art teachers described having multiple levels of students in one class period to accommodate scheduling challenges. Others described little time to interact with other faculty and staff in their buildings. Nora reported, "This year, I am teaching studio art, advanced studio painting and drawing and portfolio prep. Studio art is mostly ninth grade, but it's always mixed, just depending on what kids are able to take it. Advanced studio is usually mostly tenth grade. But again, a little bit of a mix of the upper levels, painting and drawing is mostly eleventh grade" (Nora, p. 264). She continued,

> …this year, first period, I have studio art with a portfolio student who comes in, I have my planning period, then I have advanced studio, then I have a study hall duty with seniors who come in here, then I have painting and drawing class with portfolio students who also come in, then I have studio art, then my lunch, then I have hall duty, or they will sometimes pull me from hall duty to cover another teacher's class or to cover the testing center or something like that. Then I have another studio class. And then it's activity period, which is either students come in for extra time, or that's when I have art club meet once a week, or that's also when they schedule us to have meetings. Duties can change every year. I've had lunch duty before, which is the worst. But so, the duties can change every year (Nora, p. 264).

Nora shared that she makes it a point to interact with her hall-mates, she stated, "Teachers pop in all the time. The math teacher next door, the earth science teacher across the hall, the physics teacher, we all talk about stuff all the time. Some of the special ed teachers will stop in, when possible. I'll keep the door open. Other times I close it, but people know" (Nora, p. 262). Smith remarked, "Singleton and being in this little building, I do not collaborate that much. Um, I share a wall with one teacher, and we'll talk, we say hi in the morning and sometimes one of us will have an issue and be like, I have to talk through something. That's been really nice. But this little building, I wish I could stand in the hall more and just like, I need adult interaction, you know" (Smith, p. 288).

Marie shared, "Yeah, as far as like scheduling time, you know, you have to have time to put up displays, the other teachers don't need to do. Just even like managing materials and getting things ready. Today, I had seven classes and in between, it's a lot, it's a lot to switch, you know, from kindergarten to fourth grade to, you know, Pre-K. I don't think they understand that as much. That it's not just their walking in the door, you have to be ready for them. And it's a different lesson for every class" (Marie, p. 309). She stated, "Even though the teacher's room is located across the hall, Marie commented that she has little time to "hang out" or chat with teachers who come to the teacher's room. Additionally commenting that her interactions with teachers are mostly when they are dropping off students for her class. She stated, "Mostly it's because the classroom teachers bring their kids to art and pick them up so that is how I end up seeing people. Maybe chat a little bit about kids in between if there were any issues or something" (Marie, p. 301)

Clover described her schedule, "It's like I wear so many hats all day and teaching. It's not gourmet, like I was at Francesca's for dinner, I was at McDonald's drive thru trying to teach a little bit well, instead of maybe mastery in some of the courses, because you're trying to switch gears all day and work with different content. To go from clay to eighth grade to seventh grade and studio, all in the same room. I mean, that's what being a singleton means to me" (Clover, p. 321) She also described the challenges of multi-level classes, "I asked them (counselors) to steer away from adding clay ones into clay two courses because it's just overwhelming. We did that one 20-week semester, and it was difficult to teach students clay basics while progressing with the clay twos, it was just too much" (Clover, p. 320).

Michael's school has been dealing with decreased enrollment, so her schedule has been augmented with extra duties and electives. She explained, "As the years went on, it filled up

more and more, we added sixth grade, we added an art elective. I had to fight for the grade level

shared time, because I was never able to go to these grade level department meetings. Because I

have sixth grade, I was able to get that in my schedule. Pre-K through five I see them once every

four days, sixth grade, I see them once every other day. And I alternate with health, library and

music" (Michael, p. 342). Mrs. Art described how the schedule has changed over the years,

> The district tried a variety of different scenarios. We had block scheduling for ten
> years. And the middle school, that scheduled varied. Sometimes it was, you
> would see the classes for twenty weeks. Sometimes you'd only see them for ten
> weeks. And that varied year after year…I found it very difficult. I could do it, but
> it was very difficult for the students. Especially if you had a middle school group,
> which only met once every four days. Sometimes, during the winter times if you
> had a snow day it would be a much more prolonged time between classes. And it
> was difficult to get the content of your curriculum in that block (Mrs. Art, p. 366).

Mrs. Art described her multilevel class schedule, "Yeah, I started the day, like my typical

day, for example. The class schedule could be like Studio in Art I. And then I'd have a plan

period. And then I had Studio in Art III and IV combined. Then I had a combined class of

Ceramics and Fibers and Art III and V. Back to an Art I class, a lunch, a plan, another Art I. And

then Studio and Art III and IV together. So, I had 1, 2, 3, 4, 5… I taught six classes usually every

day, that was extremely common in most school years" (Mrs. Art, p. 366). She added, "So, when

I was tasked with teaching levels, three, four, and five. And sometimes there was a sixth level,

depending on that person who doubled up all the time. So, what I would do is I would design a

curriculum that was different every year, with projects that were different every year. And I had

three binders: art three, art four, art five. And I would, I would rotate them" (Mrs. Art, p. 367).

Nina described, "The previous art teacher was like, I was there eighteen years, and I had eighteen

different schedules and routines. It's very, I feel like that's kind of their thing. They're still trying

to figure out what works. Right now, we're on a five-day rotation" (Nina, p. 388).

No Common Planning Time

Participants described having little to no common planning time with other art educators across the district. Nora reported, "However, frequently because she (elementary teacher) is so busy, and even because our new second art teacher's schedule is so busy, we very rarely have any common overlapping time during the day. Even when it comes to that activity period at the end of the day because we have kids for various things. We're trying to get kids in our room to work" (Nora, p. 267). Nora and her high school colleague have been attending BOCES provided Arts Leadership Workshops together this year. This has provided them some time to work together and share ideas for curriculum and program development (Nora, p. 269). Smith (Nora's Colleague) stated, "Yeah, no, there is not time for it, it is not built it. We meet once a month, but we don't collaborate. We don't even check in. It is like a here is what you need to know…is everyone ready for the art show" (Smith, p. 289).

Clover explained, "There're just three little bears in our district to work from. We do collaborate once in a while with band or chorus or, you know ag (agriculture), the (special areas) departments get together. There's not a lot of time for it, either. There's no common planning for us. We don't get the same periods off to really work unless it's a coincidence. So, it's not a structured time to meet as a team" (Clover, p. 323). She continued, "My partner's next door. So, there are some days she's the only interaction I have. We don't have to pass by an office or, or sign in anywhere. So, if we leave, it's up to our discretion. So, I mean, I don't know, I wouldn't say there's a lot of teacher interaction for me. Not passing by a lot of faculty on the way to my room" (Clover, p. 326). Michael explained,

> Our department does not have common time but yes, I do see them often as
> mentor to the new music teacher and part of drama club. I also do an after-school
> art club with my co-worker who is the HS art teacher. For the last two years I

have been able to join grade level and 'dept' meetings during our contractual team meeting time connected to our lunch break. I get nervous that it could be different every year, as there is always a chance the admin needs to fit an elementary class in during that time. I'd say we meet to discuss program needs once a year. Every year we say the same thing, we need to advocate and get the same time as other departments (Michael, pp. 343-344).

Mrs. Art described how her district had started a PLC that met weekly. She explained, "I believe we had been following an amended schedule on Mondays for probably three years, maybe four. Every Monday, we would dismiss at two o'clock. So, class periods would be shortened on every Monday, and the timeframe from 2pm to the end of the school day, the end of the contractual time would be spent with PLCs" (Michael, p. 344). She added, "The time was more spent on curriculum. The times where I got to interact with another art teacher would have been during the day when I had either lunch, depending on the schedule, lunch or after school" (Mrs. Art, p. 369). Nina who is in the same district as Mrs. Art responded,

> So, I'm able to connect easier because I have a set planning time. I'm able to meet them for PLCs and things along those lines. So, Appleton does it well. Being a multiple art teacher in a bigger district was actually more difficult with connections than being a singleton art teacher and a smaller district. If that makes sense. And you know, I'm sure if I was in an area where I didn't have those PLC groups and I didn't have an opportunity to see the high school teacher or the other elementary school teacher on a monthly basis. It would feel very odd in the aspect that like, you know, I'm here on an island by myself (Nina, p. 395).

Self-Doubt

Another characteristic that was identified was how being a singleton can lead to feelings of self-doubt. Nora described it this way, "I'm like, if I'm going to do something, I'm going to do something well. I will say, I've gotten better about saying no to things. I've gotten better about being like, you know what, this is okay, this is good enough. It will work for what we're doing.

But I don't like feeling like I'm failing at something. And I don't like feeling like I'm failing someone, especially students in that kind of situation. It's just a horrible feeling" (Nora, p. 273). She continued, "I did the best as I could, but I also frequently, in years when things were busier and I was really on my own, I found myself really thinking I really wish I had a partner to work with." She described times she wished she had had "people to turn to for advice when you're having difficulty with a situation" (Nora, p. 273).

Smith described, **"**Um, so as a reflection of what it is as a singleton, I'm alone." She continued, "But um, I guess it, the feeling of isolation and (pause) and maybe a little bit of self-doubt, too. I don't know, is that working? I don't know, as teachers we spend so much time reflecting on what we do. Did I say something wrong? You know, is the way I am explaining it not working" (Smith, p. 293). Later she added, "I can't imagine if I wasn't confident in what I was doing, how much I would second guess what I was doing, you know, as a singleton, or like, being worried of having like a false reality, like, am I teaching the right thing? Or, you know, am I doing this right? Is that the right way to teach it" (Smith, p. 294)?

Marie stated, "When I first started here, there were two art teachers here (at the elementary level) and then there was one. So, I really can tell the difference between having somebody to be supportive and together (with) and with curriculum, grading, even anything…bounce ideas… and then to have nobody to do that with. Its, its, I have had both so… even though I have only been at this district I have (noticed) there's a big difference." She continued, "…when it comes to actually teaching or standards, I have no one else to, you know, really say like, what do you think does this fit that? Or, you know, I have to kind of fly blind sometimes, as far as, you know, am I doing this the right way" (Marie, p. 305)? Clover shared, "For me. I've just been so consumed with my workday and my schedule and my classes and what

I'm teaching and, and it's effective, but is it exciting? Does it evolve? I don't know. I honestly don't know what my options would be" (Clover, p. 333).

Michael commented, "Yeah, because sometimes I'll get insecure and say, you know, am I doing a good job? Am I doing enough? Am I doing too much? And with different administrators? It's been different answers every time" (Michael, p. 346). Mrs. Art described how she felt early in her career when she had doubts. "So, it's kind of two-pronged, part of me felt that if I went and pestered someone else, I would be seen as really, I would be saying, weak, not knowledgeable, not worthy of the position. So, there in my mind that was that concern. If I speak up, they're gonna think I don't know what I'm doing" (Mrs. Art, p. 377).

Seek Outside Supports

All the participants identified they had sought outside support through out-of-district professional development, online resources and groups, or through friends and family. Nora shared, "Yeah, it's just I'm always looking at stuff constantly, constantly … I follow other art teachers on Instagram, on Twitter, I follow stuff on Pinterest. Like, I'm just always looking at things and saving things and thinking, how would I do that? And the wheels never stop turning" (Nora, p. 268). Smith commented, "I have learned that I get more out of those PD days. Just to get away and come back with fresh eyes, so like, oh, let's try this. It's like a fresh breath of air" (Smith, p. 289). Marie described, "So, what I found is a big online presence of art teacher groups. That has been extremely helpful. As far as I could reach out to ask questions, but mainly seeing what other art teachers (are doing), and this is globally because these groups are from, you know, all over the world. It is interesting to see me in Cowtown, I'm having the same issues as somebody in Indiana is having as far as what they are seeing with kids or even particular lessons or materials. What is working, what isn't. So, that has been really helpful for that past 5-10 years

probably" (Marie, pp. 305-306). She continued, "Someone will ask a question and many people will respond this works this way, yah know, I tried this, this doesn't work…so that I found helpful. So, it is not talking to somebody, but it has been a good way to feel like I am not so alone. That I see that other art teachers are you know dealing with the same things."

Clover stated, "I do have a sense of partner teacher, but singleton wise, I don't know, like for clay, I am the only one who teaches that course. I seek out things online, I look at other teachers' work, what they're doing in introductory classes. I don't know as though I know a different way. I've never had a group to work with" (Clover, pp. 330-331). Michael described how she relies upon out-of-district professional development groups and resources to help her develop her program. "So, about five years ago, my district purchased the Art of Education membership for me, and that's pretty much my go to, but I pull from all kinds of places. I pull from Facebook groups. I pull from, you know, the Arts Leadership group and the Madison County PLC (professional learning community) that I participate in too" (Michael, p. 346). She added,

"I always have to seek those things out myself. Like, I'll say, hey, there's a webinar, Fred's is doing this webinar on IAAP, I'm gonna get a sub. So, they never bring that stuff to me, I always have to bring it to them. And they appreciate that they're like, oh, great, you know, you're at PD. And they always say that in my professional review, that I am always trying to improve professional learning and grow and things like that" (Michael, pp. 351-352).

Mrs. Art explained, "I really gleaned a lot of inspiration and ideas from a variety of sources. From printed material, like books, magazines, periodicals, as well as online articles, and websites. And from other teachers and college professors during lectures or classes or discussions, museums and galleries, art shows, art competitions, displays, and also BOCES

classes and workshops. And additionally, like, NYSATA, and the NEA workshops and letters and other printed material like that" (Mrs. Art, p. 367). Nina described how she valued the support of her network of artist friends. "And it also helps, I think, I honestly think, sometimes it's better to talk to other artists than it is to other art teachers. I mean, that in the kindest way" (Nina, p. 384). Nina explained,

> I find a lot of my inspiration and support from not at school. I find a lot of stuff strangely, through like through the groups of artists that I work with outside of the community. I have a friend who is a printmaker, and she was like, I really would like to teach you this and then maybe, you know, you can move on and use it in your own artwork. And then if I use it in my own artwork, and then maybe I could teach that at school. Um, and honestly, social media is, sadly, very big. I go on there, and I'm like, oh, look, there's a bookbinding class for free. I'm gonna go there. There's an Empowered Educators Zoom meeting next week, I'm gonna go on there. And that is, you know, seeing other art teachers on like, Instagram, or being on groups and Facebook, Pinterest, all of those things, helped me to figure out where to get my inspiration from because if I'm not inspired, it's gonna be boring (Nina, p. 396).

Hard to Leave

An additional characteristic that participants identified was how hard it is for them to leave their classroom. Participants described loss of contact time with students and challenges with substitute teachers as reasons for turning down out of district professional development opportunities. Nora stated, "Yes and I, like, I want to ask for the time for things, but I also feel really bad when I find out that other teachers have been made to cover my class" (Nora, p. 269). She added, "But the other thing too is that when you are someone who likes to make sure that you're providing everything that you can for your students. That you're not someone that can just say, oh, well, whatever, they're just not going to be doing anything. And it's just not part of your nature and your personality, it's a tremendous amount of (stress)" (Nora, p. 273). Smith stated, "I have learned that I get more out of those PD days. Not only like, mentally, doing something

different, but the amount that happens in one day in the classroom is not going to make or break

what is going on. But it has taken me a long time to be like yeah, I am going to take a day to go

do PD" (Smith, p. 289). Marie described,

> At school, the predicament at school is, it is really hard to leave for the day. With
> the lack of subs, setting up things for a sub, it is pretty much a waisted day
> because there really isn't much I can have the sub do that is following what we
> are already doing. So, it is just a lot of free time, and you know one day projects.
> Then I feel like that gets me off track. We need to keep moving along. So, I find it
> really hard to take the time to go to Art Leadership and other conferences and
> stuff like that. I just feel like I am missing so much here, it is just not easy to do. It
> is sometime easier to just stay here. You know. Unfortunately. With the sub
> situation now, it could be a TA coming in and I feel bad for them (Marie, p. 311-
> 312).

Clover, when asked if all the art teachers were allowed to attend out of district

professional development together, responded, "Oh, God. No…So, say, for the Arts Leadership,

you know, they were okay with sending a representative from over here and one perhaps in

elementary school, but not necessarily the whole team every time." Clover noted that it had been

a long time since she had asked to attend an out of school professional development training or

workshop. She stated, "I haven't done any formal PD in so long" (Clover, p. 324). Michael

shared,

> Yeah, our sub list is, is very small, and we definitely do not get a certified sub.
> My day could even be pieced together, like with a cafeteria worker coming in and
> doing one class and then a TA coming and doing one class. So, it's very, it's
> gotten to the point where I can't leave anything that's, that's beyond like, paper
> and pencil. Unless I know who it is going to be. Things like that. I've gotten notes
> from subs, couldn't find this, this, this, and it's like, right on the table. I can't trust
> that a substitute can facilitate a lesson. And our principal shares these concerns.
> You know, we're not going to get our number one sub. You know, it's, it's really,
> it's been a struggle for a long time actually. I tried doing Google Classroom stuff,
> and anything with technology, it just it never, it never works in my favor. So, I've
> basically gone to sketchbook kind of things when I'm out. And I hate that because
> it's like my kids are missing out on their art experience that day. It's like a

throwaway day… But yeah, being out, I have a lot of anxiety about that (Michael, pp. 352-353).

Mrs. Art stated, "I wasn't willing to give up a ton of time…because your curriculum suffers, and your students suffer. And you know, they need you there. And so, it's a double-edged sword, it really is." And "Yeah, availability, frequency of absence, you know, we didn't want to be away. Things were very tight. And it was also difficult to ah, I think the subs are the biggest block to going places and doing things" (Mrs. Art, p. 372). Nina described her experience, "Unfortunately, for like the Arts Leadership, it would be like me, tech, music. If one of us is out, we kind of try to cover each other. If all three of us were out, I feel like the entire building would deflate. Like it would just not be good" (Nina, p. 396). She continued,

> So, a lot of times it's someone's auntie coming in and covering a class. First of all, they are way more dedicated than OCM BOCES. Some, most of these people are related. When I was substitute teaching, they called me for art jobs because I have a degree. So, I was able to cover that. And then I can be like, no, I don't want to go into a PE, you know, so I could deny them. Whereas these people, the people who are coming in and covering these classes are just kind of like wandering around just doing whatever they're being told. So, I'm not going to leave them like massive lessons. So, most of my training this year has been either virtual, or like book studies and things like that (Nina, p. 397).

Afterthought for Professional Development (PD) Planning

Some participants identified that their needs were often not considered in the planning of in-house professional development. Nora stated, "So, frequently when we have our Superintendent days, they'll mark time in the afternoon for us to work together on stuff, but frequently, we need a whole day. And they have us doing so many other things in the mornings and then we go to lunch and then they'll schedule other meetings in the afternoon and by the time you look at it, sometimes it's like, oh you have an hour to work in your department. Granted, if we made a case for it and asked for the time, my principal would probably give it to us. The only

thing that's really hard right now is there is not nearly enough sub coverage at our school, and I know other schools it's the same problem" (Nora, p. 269). Marie commented, "Typically staff days are geared towards "classroom teacher things" not towards "special areas" content" (Marie, p. 305). And "I kind of, although I think our district's very good at recognizing the arts and supporting the arts, I think sometimes you become a little bit of an afterthought that, like you're not part of a bigger group. So sometimes they kind of forget, okay what about the art person and librarian and other singletons, so I feel like sometimes we're kind of left off the discussions and planning and things like that" (Marie, p. 306). Clover stated, "I'm thinking of sometimes professional development days, those are days where sometimes we don't feel like we fit into what may be asked of us, because we may not have the group setting that would lend itself to those, almost think tank situations. So, we kind of just settle in like sand in some of the cracks of, of our building. Good or bad" (Clover, p. 331).

Michael described, "Our professional development has been a lot focused on reading initiatives like Wonders, so I have to sit in on a lot of literacy. We've been focused on SEL trauma-based behaviors and supporting kids' behavior. But I feel like we have not had a (arts) curriculum initiative. Other subjects have" (Michael, p. 346). She added,

> We kind of joke when we see the schedule for that sort of professional development, they (her singleton colleagues) will be like, let's see if we're on it this year. And then we'll call each other and be like, guess who was left out of professional development planning?" She noted that special areas (singletons) often get "lumped into a lot of literacy stuff" and "over the years, we've kind of been left out." She added, "We try to plan our own PD when we are not considered on PD days. Sometimes we are allowed time to meet as a department, sometimes we are expected to do the districtwide training (Michael, p. 351).

Lack of Support for Behaviors or Teaching Assistant Support

Michael also described instances where she did not feel supported in her classroom with students who have 504 plans or IEPs. She explained it this way,

> You know, we don't have TA support. That's probably my biggest, biggest complaint. Being a singleton is just, just no support. And I've tried to advocate, you know, in some of these meetings, even attending some kids' 504 and IEP meetings, and asking why, why are they not getting support an art class where they need to be able to create an artist statement as a state standard and it's always, you know, bottom of the totem pole kind of thing. We really wish we could support you, but we just don't have anyone available. We really need them. You know, that's their break. So, our specials are aligned with TA's lunch breaks, okay, so they basically like drop them off, and then leave. Sometimes they go back and assist the teacher with, you know, their things they need to do in grading, working with the team things. And then sometimes, that's usually when their breaks are scheduled. So, it's just not a possibility unless a kiddo has a one to one (Michael, pp. 348-349).

Feeling Special

Marie and Nina described instances of "feeling special" as the singleton art teacher. Marie stated, "Every once in a while, it is kind of fun to be the only art teacher because you get… when there is a display up… people will come in and complement the kids and they know… I am proud of them because you know they did it in my room. Sometimes it is kind of, to be the only one, you feel special because you are the only art teacher" (Marie, p. 310). Nina shared, "I'm a rock star because I'm the only one. So, the kids, you know, it's so easy to make the connection with the students. I have groups that just come in because they want to just make, create, and being the point of contact, that's great" (Nina, p. 403)

Question 2: What meaning do rural singleton art teachers make from their singleton teaching experiences?

Research question two, what meaning do rural singleton art teachers make from their singleton teaching experiences, is the focus of the finding presented in this section. When asked to consider the meaning of their singleton experience participants described several skills and dispositions that they associated with their ability to navigate the challenges of singleton-ness. As part of the meaning making of their experience, participants reflected upon what dispositions and skills they naturally had or developed over the years that helped them navigate teaching as a singleton educator. The following table (Table 3) illustrates skills for success that participants identified as important to their journey and essential for singletons. Skills identified by participants are in the left-hand column and individual participants are identified across the top of the chart. An X indicates participants who identified the associated skill with their experience. The following paragraphs provide data in the form of participant quotes supporting each of the skills listed.

Table 3: Skills for Success

Skills for Success	Nora *South*	Smith *South*	Marie *Cowtown*	Clover *Cowtown*	Michael *Eagleton*	Mrs. Art *Appleton*	Nina *Appleton*
Self-advocacy	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Program-advocacy	X	X	X		X	X	X
Self-reliant	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Self-reflection	X	X			X	X	
Self-starter	X	X	X	X	X		
Self-motivated	X	X		X	X	X	X
Routines			X		X		
Organization	X	X	X	X	X	X	
Resourcefulness	X	X	X	X		X	
Setting Boundaries	X		X		X		
Asking for Help	X	X			X		
Communication Skills/Outgoing	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Research	X		X	X	X	X	X
Adaptability	X	X		X	X	X	X
Creative/Inventive	X			X	X	X	
Life-long Learner	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Problem-solver	X	X		X	X	X	
Enthusiastic	X	X				X	
Willing to Work with Others	X					X	X
Compassion		X					
Confidence		X		X		X	
Humor				X			

Self-Advocacy/Program-Advocacy/Self-Reliant

Advocating for yourself and/or for your program was identified as an essential skill by all of the participants. Nora stated, "I would say, you can't be shy. Because you'll get walked over, and the program will not survive, you have to be able to have a voice to be able to share opinions, and just be able to speak your mind. Or I should say, not be afraid to speak your mind" (Nora, p. 275). She added, "Yeah. So, I mean, for the most part, anyone who's involved with staff at the school, whether it's a parent or an administrator, they know who I am, even if they don't know my name, it's like, 'oh, you're the art teacher.' Just because I'm out there doing stuff" (Nora, p. 270). Smith stated, "You know, I think a lot of it is you're like you're teaching people what you do. You kind of have to learn to advocate for yourself and your content in that way"

(Smith, p. 293). She added, "I feel like you have to do a lot more self-advocating. But I feel like you have to do that regardless as an educator. Things are changing so fast." and "I don't know how much of my *singleton-ness* makes me feel different than others" (Smith, p. 294).

Marie remarked, "I think you have to be an advocate for yourself, because you are the only one, so if something is happening, no one else is going, you don't have a team of people to say, you know, hey, that's not right or can we do something this way'" (Marie, p. 307). She identified that speaking up is not easy for her stating, "Being one voice to fight against it, it's a lot harder than, you know, a team. So, in that case, being a singleton is hard, you're here advocating for yourself. And it's, you know, you got to be more vocal about it. I'm not that type of person. So, it's, it's difficult, you know, yeah" (Marie, p. 309). Clover stated, "So, I think you have to also be assertive because you have to go to bat for yourself sometimes on some issues that no one else is facing. Or, you know, if you're a department chair, you have to hear and help other people navigate some of that too" (Clover, p. 327).

Michael described times she had to advocate for herself and for her program. She described, "So, I feel like I do have support when I have an issue like with being very frustrated with not being heard about the IAAP (Individual Arts Assessment Pathway). I didn't want to be the only district that did not have an arts pathway. I want to do everything I can to help in that aspect" (Michael, p. 349). Mrs. Art stated, "You need to complete all the work on your own curriculum development, art displays, no one else is going to do that you're the one and you need to be the advocate for your students in your program" (Mrs. Art, p. 374). Nina noted that advocacy has help her program stay noticed, she explained, "Most of my stuff goes straight up on the wall. I have three bulletin boards out front. And then I have one upstairs. And then I just

line in the halls. I feel like the more you put out, the more people are like, oh, yeah" (Nina, p. 403).

Participants identified having to be self-reliant particularly when it came to curriculum development. Nora stated, "When you're on your own like that, you have to do it. No one's going to do it for you. And if you don't do it and nothing changes, nothing is going to improve" (Nora, pp. 275-276). Marie stated, "…in a school setting nobody else really understands exactly what teaching art is like. It's not like if I was a reading teacher, I could go to another teacher in a different grade level and still talk about reading and they would get it. Art's really, its alone in its' way of doing things sometimes." She continued, "I think you have to be an advocate for yourself, because you are the only one, so if something is happening, no one else is going, you don't have a team of people to say, you know, hey, that's not right or can we do something this way" (Marie, p. 307). Clover commented, "Oh, gosh, development. I have done a lot of believe it or not, it's a day of YouTube training almost. So, you can almost do any professional skill set development on your own that you need to … I've taken the course" (Clover, p. 324-325).

Michael stated, "There was nothing. There was no binder, there was no (new) New York State Standards to reference, there wasn't much." She noted that she has "always had the lead role in establishing my curriculum." She recalled getting her first "curriculum kit" from OCMBOCES and "Then I just, each year, built it. Built it little by little" (Michael, p. 345). She added, "When the standards came out for a couple years, I blew it up and I just kept it on my desk, like one of those big calendar maps. So, it was right under my laptop, so every time (I can look at it) and that's how I taught myself the standards" (Michael, p. 346). Mrs. Art stated, "Because you don't have the other, you don't have a group of people. If you have a question about content, it's one thing to have a question about your computer not working, you can get

help for that. But otherwise, if you're not relying on you, there's no other individual to get feedback, or immediate feedback from as quickly as you could if you had a colleague right next door who was teaching the same thing" (Mrs. Art, p. 377).

Nina stated, "I feel like I'm in control a lot, which, that might be my personality trait, but it works really well here. And it works really well I think probably as a singleton teacher, if I had to rely on someone for things, it probably wouldn't work" (Nina, p. 405). She added, "So yeah, I find a lot more on my own. It's not that it's not that our district isn't supportive in learning. It's I think there's just other things that they're more concerned with" (Nina, p. 396).

Self-Reflection

Some of the participants explicitly identified self-reflection as an important skill. Nora stated, "I went through everything to see what they were doing. Some of the stuff I kind of carried over the first year because there were some kids who were very unhappy that she had retired. But then every year that went by I, I'm always reflecting and making changes. So, and the more experience I got, the more I've done with everything" (Nora, p. 267). Smith shared, "I don't know the best way to do things. I know how to do it my way, but I'm, well maybe it's only my personality, but I'm always looking to see how other people do it or 'what is something that you've tried, what worked, what didn't work.' Even what worked for one year teaching, might not work for the next, depending upon the students" (Smith, p. 294).

Michael described, "So, every year before school gets started, I always like, I always commit a day to curriculum. So, I will go through my scope and sequence, my year at-a- glance, I will rework it. I'm constantly changing things, adding things, getting rid of things that aren't working. And I feel like reflecting on that, and just that being ongoing all the time, that's kind of

helped me grow" (Michael, p. 356). Mrs. Art stated, "And so, I learned by observing and looking at the artwork that was created and listening and taught myself how to paint that way. So, I kind of, you know, tried to follow the mold of that other person. As far as other things when it was just my own creative kind of things I'd seen before or stuff I had in Art Education programs and other people working in the art ed program, and their lesson plans to judge and take part or whole of what I thought would work in my own classroom" (Mrs. Art, p. 377).

Self-Starter/Self-Motivated

Being a self-starter or self-motivated was another frequently reported skill. Nora stated, "Yeah, I don't do all of the same stuff every year, that would be boring for everyone" (Nora, p. 267). She added how having the autonomy to create her curriculum motivates her teaching. She explained, "Well, I would say it really gives me the opportunity to teach the kids about the kinds of art that I'm excited about. Uh, and like I can make the curriculum fit that. I'm not being dictated to by someone higher up about no you can only do this. If there's something new, that I'm excited about, that I can bring in and try with the kids, that we haven't done before, I can. And there isn't anything stopping me from doing that" (Nora, p. 267). When asked about skills for success, Marie stated, "I wrote self-starter (as a characteristic), as far as you have to do the research, you have to do the, you know, watch the videos, you have to find all the materials and try it yourself. So yeah, and that, that takes time. So, being one, if there's several people doing that you can kind of pool your ideas. If one person is to start something new. It takes a lot of time, because you're, you know, you're the only one doing it" (Marie, p. 309).

Clover when describing the responsibilities of being a singleton teachers identified that "I think you have to be a Jack of all trades. Like if you can't, you've got to be able to almost be an independent learner. To tackle a few things that might get thrown on your plate that you weren't

expecting to teach or maybe even have a background in. You don't know from one minute…you're going over to teach sixth grade, and me being asked to come up when I was a K-6 teacher and teach a studio. You're just going to do it. I mean, you have to be intelligent and gritty" (Clover, p. 332). Michael demonstrated her self-motivation by asking to participate in professional development to develop her program. She stated, "And putting in for those kinds of things, like, this is what I need for students to be successful. So, I feel like I've gotten better at setting boundaries and asking for help, and advocating and so, a lot to do. And I feel like communication is always something that needs to be worked on" (Michael, p. 357). Mrs. Art stated, "You have to be self-motivated; you have to be a problem solver. You really have to be self-sufficient. You have to be very organized. And you have to be inventive and creative" (Mrs. Art, p. 374). Nina simply stated, "I don't know any teachers that aren't motivated, but you need to be pretty motivated" to be a singleton art teacher" (Nina, p. 405).

Routines/Organization/Resourcefulness

Developing routines, being organized, and resourcefulness were also skills participants identified as essential for singletons. Nora noted, "I label everything. I use lots of labels to organize. I am very big on using bins to help separate and organize things" (Nora, p. 276). To help augment her supplies, Nora described her resourcefulness, "… at this point, I have several colleagues who know what kind of art materials that I'm always looking for. Like interesting surfaces to paint on and stuff like that. Or I will frequently… like I just recently emailed the staff and said, 'Hey, while everyone's getting ready for the holidays, if anyone has any pieces of Styrofoam…' and I described what I was looking for, 'we can use it for this new project that we're doing.' And the next day three people brought stuff in for me. So, they're always really good about that" (Nora, pp. 265-266). Smith stated, "I'm an organizer and I can manage

materials and think creatively and help students come up with a weird project that they want to make. And I'm like, 'let's figure it out'. That's just my brain, that's how I act" (Smith, p. 283).

Marie stated, **"I do have pretty strong routines just to make the most of the forty minutes"** (Marie, p. 304). She added, "I find that I have to be organized, because no one else is helping me, so I had to find ways to keep myself organized because… when we have the art show at the end of the year… I am the one responsible for every piece of artwork, getting it up, getting it prepared, so you know, it's a lot, so I have to become very organized in lots of ways as far as storage of projects and what to send home and don't send home…" (Marie, p. 310). Clover commented, "Organization is probably the biggest thing for me and I'm very good at that. Probably very type A about things" (Clover, p. 332).

Michael stated, "Organization yes! And putting in for those kinds of things, like, this is what I need for students to be successful" (Michael, p. 337). Mrs. At described how organizing her curriculum into a three-year rotation helped her manage her multi-level classes. She stated, "So, I made it, so I would not be tearing my hair out teaching. I could devote equal time to everybody. Nobody would be confused. It would just be just more fluid and organized. So that's how I did that" (Mrs. Art, p. 367).

Setting Boundaries

Participants identified that when you are a singleton you need to be able to set boundaries. Nora shared, "…I mean it's just it's really hard sometimes feeling like you have to do all the things because there's no one else to do it. I've gotten better about saying no to things. Like, I will not, I made it a rule for myself, where I will not do extra-curricular things at school that are not related to art." Marie described, **"Classroom teachers are fine if I am going to be**

doing something with them as far as a lesson with them. Well, I would not even say that, because I really don't feel like they understand my classroom setting. They don't understand a lot about what we do in special areas. So, sometimes I find that actually a hinderance. You know I'm like, yes, I'll do it but if you do it my way. (Laughs) Don't tell me what to do, I'll work with you, but it is sometimes hard. Because I really don't feel like a classroom teacher really gets what goes on in an art room" (Marie, p. 307). She added, "You know when they have the kids all day every day they could squeeze in an extra thirty minutes, but I don't have that flexibility… also you know I have my own standards to work on. I can't just throw in something, you know, that is totally not related, to just take something off their plate. I have learned to say no" (Marie, p. 307).

Michael noted, "So, I feel like I've gotten better at setting boundaries and asking for help, and advocating and so, a lot to do. And I feel like communication is always something that needs to be worked on" (Michael, p. 357). She continued, "Or they'll ask me to do things, and I will I know, I have boundaries with now. And I'll say, no, absolutely not. I'm not doing that. I have a curriculum, I can't just, you know, have them do that in my class, I can't fit that in. And then they kind of get a little bit like, what, wait a second, like, you know, it's art class, why can't you? Why can't you fit this in" (Michael, p. 347-348)? Nina described a time without boundaries,

> The last principal had me, I was very close to not staying here, because of what she saw as important, and because she saw me as being just a warm body that didn't need to do anything, no planning, no prep, no nothing. So, I was teaching a math circle and ELA circle. I was doing an hour of recess duty every day. I was doing lunch duty. I literally had fifteen minutes to myself, and I had to fight for those fifteen minutes during my lunch, because she just saw me as being like, well, you don't have anything on your schedule during this time. So, I'm going to put you in second grade, I'm going to put you in fourth grade, I'm going to put you in kindergarten. It was like the minute I got in until the minute I was done. I did not do as much as I wish that I could have done last year (in art) due to the fact

that I was seen as just kind of being, you know, a warm body because the arts aren't as valued as a lot of other things (Nina, p. 388).

Asking for Help

Participants identified that being willing to ask for help is an important skill when you are a singleton teacher. Nora described her early days teaching, "I was lucky in that my mentor teacher was our school librarian and did have a fine art background originally before she went back and got her librarian degree. So, she was helpful when it came to asking someone for advice, even if it wasn't the same as, like, collaborating with another art teacher" (Nora, p. 267). She added, "I'm not afraid to approach another teacher and say, hey, I have this idea. Is this something that we collaborate on? Sometimes it pans out, sometimes it doesn't" (Nora, p. 275). Smith recently moved back to New York State. She shared, "I just want to know who is out there. Who can I lean on? I want to know, does this already exist and how do I get involved" (Smith, p. 296). Michael stated, "Yeah, I think that's really the Achilles heel, is just taking all of it on by yourself and not being able to share that weight with anybody else. I've gotten better about asking for help and standing up for myself and having boundaries and, and even standing up to the to the high school art teacher about you know, like, this is not *want to* this is *a must do* kind of thing. But yeah, it's definitely lonely" (Michael, p. 358).

Mrs. Art described that early in her career she was afraid to ask for help. She stated, "So, it's kind of two-pronged, part of me felt that if I went and pestered someone else, I would be seen as really, I would be saying, weak, not knowledgeable, not worthy of the position. So, they're in my mind that was that concern. If I speak up, they're gonna think I don't know what I'm doing" (Mrs. Art, p. 377). For Nina, asking for help to understand the culture of her students and create meaningful lessons has been a challenge. She stated, "Being expected to achieve artistically

cultural lessons without having anyone to help me learn, because you don't know what you don't

know, is, it's basically like a hamster running on a wheel, I'm trying my best to find connections"

(Nina, pp. 397-398). And "So, I do reach out to the previous teacher a little bit. And I talked to a

lot of the people who are established here in the community to figure out what it is that, you

know, what holds cultural significance here" (Nina, p. 392).

Communication

Participants identified that communication skills are important when you are a singleton.

Smith stated, "I also feel like you have to be outgoing, just so you can make connections"

(Smith, p. 294). She added, "So, I think as a singleton I am always looking for ways to try and

connect to other people. Do you know my language? Do you understand me" (Smith, pp. 293-

294)? Michael described that reaching out and communicating can be challenging. She

explained, "So, I've always been open to working with grade level teachers and doing project-

based learning and things like that. And I feel like they have their projects, they have their

curriculums, like they're not super interested, just so when I would seek out or email and say,

hey, you know, what, how can I support, you know, your curriculum, Social Studies, Science,

Math. They weren't super receptive to it" (Michael, p. 347). Nina shared, "It's like, yeah, again,

to the communication and stuff. I feel like you're stronger when you can communicate, and I get

that everybody's busy" (Nina, p. 395). She described,

> So when I worked in other districts, especially the city school district, there was a
> lot more of, there was a stronger bond between the art teachers, even if you only
> saw them once a year at the district, all city art show, there was, you know, we
> communicated and talked and stayed on top of each other's you know, work and
> stuff like that. Even though the district is massive. I think because everyone here
> is a singleton art teacher. That component of communication is kind of like
> feathered away or whispered away or whatever. And it's been difficult. Like, I feel
> like I'm the one pushing a lot to be like, hey, let's do something together. Hey,
> let's figure this out. Hey, you know, let's, let's try to do this together. And a lot of

times, it's, you know, teachers going oh, okay. Because they haven't had to do it in a long time (Nina, p. 402).

Research

Research skills and being a life-long learner were identified as important skills. Nora stated, "I will watch tutorials. I will read things. I am no stranger to even using YouTube to figure out how to do something." She continued, "I'm not afraid to get my hands dirty and make some bad art before I make some not bad art" (Nora, p. 275). Smith described,

> I am trying to think exactly how far, well maybe right around COVID times all of
>
> these Facebook teacher groups came about, and I really started to tap into those,
>
> and I have found it so beneficial. Because I have been able to post question or is
>
> someone post a question, I find myself reading through all of their comments and
>
> I feel like I learn a lot from that." She continued, "I don't know the best way to
>
> do things. I know how to do it my way, but I'm, well maybe it's only my
>
> personality, but I'm always looking to see how other people do it or 'what is
>
> something that you've tried, what worked, what didn't work.' Even what worked
>
> for one year teaching might not work for the next, depending upon the students
>
> (Smith, p. 294).

As already mentioned, Marie described reaching out to online art teacher communities for support and learning. Clover stated "Oh, gosh, development. I have done a lot of believe it or not, it's a day of YouTube training almost. So, you can almost do any professional skill set development on your own that you need to … I've taken the course" (Clover, pp. 324-325). And "I think you have to be a Jack of all trades. Like if you can't, you've got to be able to almost be an independent learner" (Clover, p. 332). Michael referred to other resources she used to develop

her curriculum such as Facebook groups, TAB Facebook page, Teachers Pay Teachers, reading materials on topics that she is interested in such as "lately, I'd say over the last five, five years or so I've been reading a lot about choice and TAB and that's kind of been my focus" (Michael, p. 347).

Mrs. Art stated, "I really gleaned a lot of inspiration and ideas from a variety of sources. From printed material, like books, magazines, periodicals, as well as online articles, and websites. And from other teachers and college professors during lectures or classes or discussions, museums and galleries, art shows, art competitions, displays, and also BOCES classes and workshops. And additionally, like, NYSATA, and the NEA workshops and letters and other printed material like that" (Mrs. Art, p. 367). Nina described, "So, I'm doing that NEA the micro credentials. Have you seen those, they have a whole set of them on Native Americans and being culturally aware, you know, all of that. And I just signed up for one because I'm like, I think my brain needs to do more to understand. And I wish that this was, you know, I'm always, I'll be forever learning. I think anybody who's in education will be forever learning" (Nina, p. 406).

Adaptability/Creativity/Inventive

Participants identified adaptability, creativity, and being inventive as singleton skills for success. Smith stated, "I'll always take a kid, you know, my door is always open. Not everyone feels that way. Not everyone is in the same boat. Or like in the middle of the semester, I have a new kid starting tomorrow. I'm like, well, get him in quick because we are starting a new project" (Smith, pp. 287-288). Marie described an example of adaptability,

> You know it is funny, so much has changed. I guess, with school, you take… like
> every year is a new year. It is the same job, but it is not the same job at all. It is

different kids, it is different schedules, its different people, so I almost think that kind of gets you, draws you in thinking like, okay, I can do this for this year, but it will change next year. It will be different next year and hoping it will be better in some way, sometimes it's not, but I think education draws you in like that. Because every year is a totally different year. It's not, it doesn't turn into drudgery, like oh, I need a change. Because there is going to be some sort of change every year, positive or not. So, I think that is interesting because I think back on all my time here, it has been completely different. You know, go back ten years, fifteen years, twenty years, it is like it was a totally different experience then. Every year I think it can't get worse (laughs), but maybe it does (laughs). I have always said that, but every year things maybe get worse but then there are good things too. Your administrators come and go. I really like the administrators we have now, so that helps (Marie. pp. 312-313).

Problem-solving/ Life-long Learner

Clover shared, "You have a few projects in your tool belt, and you hopefully got some good experience management wise in your placements to know some of the fires, how to put them out. But I think your first ten years is in our field… oh my god, you don't know what's going to blow up, what's going to catch on fire, what's going to medically happen. So, you really have to be like a problem solver. And critical thinking comes into play" (Clover, pp. 332-333).

Mrs. Art Stated, "Oh, gosh, the main thing is that creative freedom. To have no one there to tell you no. Not that I was a risk taker. But when you get this idea that you're going to do totems, and we're going to do them out of clay, and we're going to have teams and you just kind of run with these ideas. So that creative freedom was just really wonderful, for me. I did not find a really negative about having to work and not answer to anyone" (Mrs. Art, p. 374).

Nina stated, "Yeah, when I was at the city school district, I didn't need to be flexible for anything. It was like, this is my schedule. This is what I have. This is what I do. Boom, done. And it was like, you know, school starts at 7:45am. I was there at 7:40am. And school ended at 3:10 pm. And I was in my car at 3:15pm. Because everything was so structured there" (Nina, p.

399). She added, "So, you know, as much as being a singleton is hard. It's also that flexible range that you have to find because the value system for specials is so different. All the way across the board" (Nina, p. 340). Nina continued, "You need to be flexible, and also have strong communication. But those two kind-of, you know, go back and forth with each other. So, I think, as a singleton, you need to be, you know, out there and put yourself out there to increase that engagement. But you also need to be super flexible because you're the only one" (Nina, p. 405).

Enthusiastic/Compassion/Confidence/Work with Others/Humor

Enthusiasm, confidence, compassion, willingness to work with others, and humor were also mentioned as important skills. Nora described her enthusiasm for teaching art. When asked why she went into teaching art, Nora commented, "… it's just, it was something that I could see myself doing for a full-time job. I got to help people and make a difference and things, but I also got to work creatively every day. And I knew, I did not want a job where I'm sitting behind a desk or working behind a shop counter or anything like that. I just thought it gave me the most opportunity to feel like I was making a difference in the world, but still be creatively engaged" (Nora, pp. 260-261). Smith stated, "I feel like with people I meet, and whatever, life interactions, I am always willing to jump in and lend a helping hand. That personality trait is from being from this school district, you know, like, you learn that" (Smith, p. 287). When asked what skills help her to be successful, Smith responded "confidence in what I am doing." She stated, "But that also comes with experience, you know, I was not confident at first. It took however many years of teaching and reflection and experience to get to that point" (Smith, p. 292). Clover responded, "Yeah, flexibility. Sense of humor, for sure" (Clover, p. 332). Mrs. Art stated that singleton-ness "Professionally, it made me work harder, and work stronger. I am now more flexible and

understanding. It built my self-confidence. I really see things now as new opportunities to learn and stretch my capabilities" (Mrs. Art, p. 377).

Nina stated, "I truly love what I do. And if I could have all the kids every other day, I would love it even more" (Nina, p. 403). She added, "When I went to do that Louise Nevelson project with another teacher. I said, here's all this information, I'll prep and plan for everything, please do this with me. Thank you, that sort of thing. So, not only being flexible, but also having that open mindset. You know, and wanting to jump in wherever is needed" (Nina, pp. 402-403). She described this autonomy and the creation of learning opportunities through collaboration as "magical" (Nina, p. 404).

Question Three: What shared meanings do a group of rural singleton art teachers make from their collective experience as lone content specialist in their school or district?

Research question three, what shared meanings do a group of rural singleton art teachers make from their collective experience as lone content specialist in their school or district, is the focus of the findings presented in this section. Participants were invited to attend a virtual panel discussion following the completion of the interview portion of this study. Prior to the Zoom meet participants were sent a Google doc with the charts listing characteristics and skills they had collectively identified in their individual interviews, a list of the themes identified from their stories, and a list of the wants they requested for future supports and professional development initiatives. No interview data was included in the tables in the Google doc. Participants were asked to review the characteristics and skills and select the ones that fit their singleton experience. Not all participants were able to attend the panel discussion. In attendance were Clover, Nora, Mrs. Art, and Michael (indicated in green). Nina and Marie completed the charts although they were not able to attend (indicated in orange). Smith was unable to participate.

The following tables, Table 4: Characteristics/Panel Discussion and Table 5: Skills for Success/Panel Discussion, add the findings from the panel discussion to the interview findings (previously presented Tables 2 and 3). Uppercase **X** indicates findings from interviews already presented in Table 2. Lowercase **x** indicates selections made by participants prior to the panel discussion.

Table 4: Characteristics/Panel Discussion

Characteristics	Nora *South*	Smith *South*	Marie *Cowtown*	Clover *Cowtown*	Michael *Eagleton*	Mrs. Art *Appleton*	Nina *Appleton*
Autonomy ~ Pro Freedom	Xx	X	Xx		Xx	Xx	Xx
Autonomy ~ Con Responsibility	X	X	x		Xx	X	X
Only One ~ Job Demands	Xx	X	Xx	X	Xx	X	X
Only One ~ Content Specialist	Xx	X	Xx	X	Xx	X	X
Only One ~ Art Influence	x	X	Xx		X	X	
Lonely/Isolated	Xx	X	Xx	X	Xx	x	Xx
No Team/Bounce Ideas/Share Content	Xx	X	Xx	X	Xx	X	X
Curriculum ~ Develop your own	Xx	X	Xx	Xx	Xx	Xx	X
Busy Schedule	Xx	X	Xx	Xx		Xx	X
Multilevel Classes	Xx		x	Xx		Xx	x
Little Time for Interactions with others	Xx	X	X	Xx	Xx	Xx	
No Common Planning Time	Xx	X		Xx	X	x	
Self-Doubt	X	X	X	X	Xx	X	
Seek Outside Supports	Xx	X	Xx	X	Xx	Xx	Xx
Hard to Leave	Xx		X	Xx	X	X	x
Afterthought for PD	Xx		Xx	Xx	Xx	x	x
Lack of Support for Behaviors/No TA Support	x				Xx	x	x
Seen as Special	x		Xx		x	x	Xx

Table 5: Skills for Success/Panel Discussion

Skills for Success	Nora South	Smith South	Marie Cowtown	Clover Cowtown	Michael Eagleton	Mrs. Art Appleton	Nina Appleton
Self-advocacy	Xx	X	X	Xx	Xx	Xx	Xx
Program-advocacy	Xx	X	X	Xx	Xx	Xx	Xx
Self-reliant	Xx	X	X	Xx	Xx	Xx	Xx
Self-reflection	Xx	X			Xx	Xx	x
Self-starter	Xx	X	X	Xx	Xx	x	x
Self-motivated	Xx	X		Xx	Xx	Xx	Xx
Routines	Xx		X	X	Xx	x	x
Organization	Xx	X	X	Xx	Xx	Xx	x
Resourcefulness	Xx	X	X	Xx	x	Xx	x
Setting Boundaries	Xx		X		Xx		x
Asking for Help	Xx	X		X	X		x
Communication Skills/Outgoing	Xx	X	X	Xx	X	Xx	Xx
Research	Xx		X	Xx	Xx	Xx	Xx
Adaptability	Xx	X		Xx	Xx	Xx	Xx
Creative/Inventive	Xx			Xx	Xx	Xx	x
Life-long Learner	Xx	X	X	Xx	Xx	Xx	Xx
Problem-solver	Xx	X		Xx	Xx	Xx	x
Enthusiastic	Xx	X		x	X	Xx	x
Willing to Work with Others	Xx			x	X	Xx	Xx
Compassion	x	X		x	X	Xx	x
Confidence	x	X		Xx		Xx	x
Humor	x			Xx	X	x	x

The following themes emerged from the seven participants' storied accounts of their singleton experience.

Themes:

- You *don't know what you don't know.*
- Time
- Lack of colleagues and administrative understanding of art content
- Frequent administrative changes
- Being away from the classroom and sub availability
- Professional development is not geared towards art content or classroom friendly.
- Scheduling demands and difficulty
- Other singletons as support

Each of these themes presents another dimension of the singleton experience that

manifests within and in-between the characteristics and skills identified by the participants.

During the panel discussion participants had the opportunity to discuss the validity of these

themes and co-construct meaning from their experiences. A discussion, along with participant examples, and analysis of these themes is presented in chapter five where the question, what shared meanings do a group of rural singleton art teachers make from their collective experience as lone content specialist in their school or district is further explored in the analysis of the findings of this study.

Additionally, at the end of the three-interview series, participants were asked to identify wants (and needs) they have as singleton educators. During the panel discussion participants had the opportunity to validate these wants and needs as a group as part of this process of shared meaning making (Patton, 2015; Seidman, 2013). The identified wants and needs are listed below.

Wants:

- Common planning time with content peers for curriculum development and team building
- Hands-on content specific professional development
- Art opportunities for students
- Local art teacher network across districts
- Online resources for local art opportunities and lesson exemplars
- Access to content specialists for help with processes and technical questions
- Resource lending library

During the panel discussion participants were asked to review the findings from their collective interviews. Participants were not provided with the individual findings collected from my analysis of their interviews and identification of characteristics from their stories. This allowed the participants to review all the characteristics that emerged across contexts and experiences. During the panel discussion participants had the opportunity to review the characteristics as a whole and provide feedback, discuss, the merit of each finding. Together the group reviewed the charts and made recommendations for changes, discussed the meaning of each finding as necessary, and determined if the finding was legitimate. Through a presentation,

discussion, and evaluation of the data, participants co-constructed a shared understanding of their experience as singletons (Phillips, 2000; Richardson, 2003) and the singleton phenomenon. This process of shared meaning making (Seidman, 2013), when participants "come to an agreement about the nature and warrant of a description of a phenomenon or its relationship to others" (Richardson, 2003, p. 3), allows the participants to generate knowledge claims about the singleton phenomenon. The discussion revealed the following findings.

The presentation and discussion began with the themes, then characteristics, and concluded with wants and needs. When asked if they agreed with the themes that emerged the participants responded, "Oh, yeah, I agree with those, Mary, I think we touched upon all of those in our conversations" (Clover). The others (Nora, Michael, and Mrs. Art) nodded in agreement. The attention then turned to the list of singleton characteristics.

A discussion of the characteristic of *Little Time for Interactions with others* came up with participants describing their working situations and ability to interact with other art teachers and faculty. Clover asked, "I was curious, out of everyone here, Mary, if you and I are the only partners. Like do they have, do you all have someone else that you work with daily as another art counterpart?" Michael responded, "I don't have a partner per se. I'm the only elementary art teacher but the middle school high school art teacher, we have a great relationship. And we do. We do get together. You know, it's very casual, like you said, like, hey, how's it going? But we aren't close to each other. We don't have, like a designated arts wing, and I've been moved quite a bit. So now that I'm in the main building, I see him more than I than I ever have. But, yeah, he we're in totally different realms as far as child development and our age group. So, he comes into my room and thinks like a rainbow exploded in here. He stays away. He likes his high school, his high school world, but he's, he was a great mentor." Nora stated, "I recently got one,

we added a second art teacher full time last year, it had been a part time position that had changed over a few times before that, and for that it had just been me so it wasn't until this year that I had another full time art teacher in the building to work with, uh, not technically in the building, she's in like the tech building. That's next door. But it's the first time I've had like a partner teacher." Mrs. Art added, "I had another full-time partner as well. Even though we were not teaching the same subjects, we did have rooms right next to one another. So that was really nice."

The discussion continued about the ability to interact with others. Nora noted, "Yeah, I like, I make it a point to try and talk with the people who are around me, but some of the teachers who are in other parts of the building, I just don't see them often because I'm in my room teaching all day." Mrs. Art stated, "Yeah, that's the hard part is not having similar planning time or lunchtime or any time together. You grab a quick hello and exchange whatever at the beginning of the day, and at the end of the day, and that's sometimes years go by, and it was like that, even though we were just right next door to one another." After discussion, the group agreed that *Little Time for Interactions with others* should remain on the list.

The next characteristic that was raised for discussion was regarding autonomy. The characteristic list from my findings listed *Autonomy ~ Pro Freedom* and *Autonomy ~ Con Responsibility*. All panel participants responded yes to autonomy freedom as a pro but only Michael indicated autonomy responsibility as a con, even though the interview data indicated that others had described responsibility as a "con." The group did not have anything they wanted to share about autonomy. When asked if they would prefer to see the category of autonomy changed to *Autonomy ~ Freedom/Responsibility* rather than pro and con they responded "sure" and "yeah." Later I revised Autonomy to make sure I had understood their decision stating, "I

can change the autonomy, one where it says, freedom, and then just do it like a hyphen with responsibility. It doesn't have to be a positive or negative. It's a kind of a ying and yang. I see Nora, you're shaking your head, yes. Is that okay for everybody?" Nora responded, "Yeah, I agree with that." Others nodded.

Some discussion occurred regarding *Only One – Content Specialist*. Nora stated, "Well, and honestly, I was debating how to answer some of these since the situation that our school changed. So recently, suddenly I'm not all on my own anymore. So, I wasn't sure if I should be answering based on what the majority of my experience has been, or what my experience currently is." Clover stated, "I don't know if I found it applied, because I have you." Nora chose to add *Only One – Content Specialist* to her personal selections and the group agreed to keep it as a characteristic.

The next characteristic of singleton-ness brought up for discussion was *Lonely/ Isolated*. Mrs. Art stated, "Well, lonely is also it depends on where your room is in proximity to the rest of the school building. So, you could, uh, my room was pretty off to one end of the school building, so I didn't have a lot of foot traffic of my peers, for sure. So, you do kind of feel a little bit, oh, well, it's all me, kind of deal. But, you know, once you get out into a faculty meeting, or other things like that, you really don't feel, you know, you feel like you're one of the group kinds of thing." The others agreed.

The characteristic *Curriculum ~ Develop your own* was also discussed. Mrs. Art commented, "Because arts does not have, for instance, if you're teaching science or you're teaching math, there's, or social studies, there's content that you must, without, without question, get through during the school year, specifically, at the high school level. If you are prepping a group of students for a final exam or region, state, you're responsible for. Whereas in the art

department, we really did have the ability to develop a curriculum based on your own interests or in part based on your own interests and talents." Michael added, "Yeah. So, curriculum for me, like, it's just like, I love having the freedom and using my philosophy, and it's just a lot of work. Like, a lot of work all the time. That falls on my shoulders." Although this characteristic is content specific, participants agreed it has significance as a characteristic of their singleton-ness.

The next characteristic brought up was *Self-Doubt*. Clover noted, "Yeah, I don't know. If, I don't, I don't know if I consider that one, though." Later, Clover commented, "Self-doubt, Mary, could stay. I think that's a good one. We question ourselves a lot, especially if you don't have someone in support of you." Michael stated, "Yeah, I think I think it's one that can stay. I feel like I go through that cycle a lot. Where it's, you know, doubting, doing too much doing too little. Aligning the standards, just always constantly overthinking, I guess." Nora added, "Yeah, I think it's something that comes and goes." Mrs. Art added, "I agree. Keep it." I asked, "Anything else on there that should come off?" No responses.

The discussion moved to art specific characteristics. Nora commented, "Um, I thought, the lack of understanding of art content or lack of respect, they kind of go together. I don't know if they need to be a separate thing. I don't, I don't know. I was, because I was going through debating stuff as I was checking, checking the boxes, and maybe I was just overthinking things." Mrs. Art stated, "I think they're; they can be two different ones. Specifically, you know, people can respect you, but they don't have to understand it. But if you could work in a way worded in such a way that it covered both items, that would be fine." Clover added, "Yeah, they're two different things, I think, too." After discussion, Nora replied, "Yeah, that makes sense." I asked, "Anything else?" Clover, "No, they're all good, Mary, I think they go both ways that can be positives and negatives." Heads nod.

Next the panel looked at *Skills for Success*. After reading through the skills, I asked for changes or additions. Clover commented, "I think those are all good ones." Heads nod. The final category was the list of *Wants*. When I asked if there were any items for discussion regarding wants Michael responded, "I think that looks good." The others nodded.

Summary

This chapter presented the findings from the storied accounts of seven singleton art teachers teaching in small rural school districts. Each teacher participated in a series of three interviews and four of the seven teachers participated in a follow-up group panel discussion of the findings. Prior to the first interview teachers completed a demographic questionnaire. After each interview participants were provided the interview transcript to review to ensure the accuracy and clarity of the information. The first interview documented participants' life history and personal and professional context. The second interview documented participants' descriptions of their singleton experience. The third interview documented participants' meaning making of their singleton experience. A narrative story of each participant's lived experiences as a singleton art teacher in a small rural district compiled from their interview and contextual data is included in Appendix C. This chapter reported the findings organized into lists of characteristics of singleton-ness, skills for success, followed by themes and wants.

Not all participants were able to attend the virtual panel discussion, however, all but one responded to the shared document where participants were asked to select characteristics from my analysis of the interviews that they identified as significant to their singleton experience. Panel discussion members engaged in discussion regarding the findings and through a process of shared meaning making (Patten, 2015; Seidman, 2013) co-constructed shared understandings of their experiences as singletons (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Phillips, 2000; Richardson, 2003).

In chapter five, I will analyze the findings and engage in a discussion of the new knowledge that has emerged from the participants' stories of singleton-ness. I will explore the characteristics participants have identified as part of their shared experience as well as the themes that have emerged, analyzing and describing the nuances of the singleton phenomenon. Chapter five will focus on the question, what shared meanings do a group of rural singleton art teachers make from their collective experience as lone content specialist in their school or district. Chapter six will focus on the question; how the shared meaning of singleton-ness can inform initiatives to provide professional development for singleton arts educators. I will discuss the wants participants identified in the context of the characteristics of their singleton experience and how this information can inform professional development initiatives targeted towards the needs of singleton educators. I will conclude the chapter with a discussion of the limitations of this study and recommendations for further research.

Chapter 5: Surviving Singleton-ness

Introduction

In chapter four, I began with a presentation of district and participant data illustrating the context of the study, rural schools, and participants, singleton art educators. I then provided a brief introduction to each participant, further establishing the context of her experience. According to Bogdan & Biklen (2007), "To divorce the act, word, or gesture from its context is, for the qualitative researcher, to lose sight of significance" (p. 5). I followed with a report of the findings of the study organized by the research questions being explored. First, I presented the characteristics each participant identified as significant to their experience of the phenomenon of singleton-ness, followed by skills they identified as essential and that they associate with their singleton teaching experience. I provided textual evidence from participants' storied accounts that illustrated their experience with the characteristics and skills they identified. Additionally, I provided findings from a succeeding virtual panel discussion where participants had the opportunity to review and discuss the findings as a group in a process of shared meaning making (Patton, 2015; Vygotsky, 1987) These meanings, common understandings, or shared truths, then became knowledge (Phillips, 2000; Richardson, 2003), gained from their collective experiences as singletons.

In addition, in chapter four, I provided a list of common themes that emerged from the data. These findings were also reviewed and discussed by the panel to corroborate the validity of these themes as representative of their singleton experience. The findings chapter concluded with the presentation of a compiled list of *wants* each participant identified when asked what they need to support their singleton art teaching and students' learning and what they would want provided in future professional development training. Again, these *wants* were reviewed by the panel and affirmed as accurate to the collective needs each participant voiced.

This fifth chapter is an analysis of the information that is found in the spaces between the characteristics of singleton-ness and the skills that singletons possess. This analysis will illuminate the contextual story of the nuances that exist as part of the singleton phenomenon and the singleton teachers who live, work, and teach in these environments. To understand the needs and wants of singleton art educators, and I would argue singletons in general, one must first identify the characteristics of the phenomenon of singleton-ness and then explore how singletons navigate these characteristics within their contexts. One must ask, what skills have singletons acquired or resourced have they used to perform in these environments and what can we learn from their storied accounts of this experience?

This discussion explores what I discovered from witnessing and documenting the storied accounts of seven singleton art teachers teaching in small rural districts in Central New York. Over the course of three interviews teachers revealed to me their frank, honest, experiences navigating singleton-ness. I was surprised by their eagerness to tell their stories, not only for themselves, but for their notable desire to put forward their experiences as information to support and help future generations of singleton teachers. Each teacher's unique story adds nuance and context to the understanding of singleton-ness. Bogdan and Biklen (2007) describe this as "constructing a picture that takes shape as you collect and examine the parts" (p. 6). Creswell notes that the interpretive/constructivist researcher relies upon "participants' views of the situation being studied" to "generate or inductively develop a theory or pattern of meanings" (2003, pp. 8-9). This chapter is an exploration of the pattern of meanings generated from seven rural singleton art teachers' stories.

To facilitate this discussion, I have focused the report of my analysis on findings that are particularly significant to my earlier problem statement noting a gap in research focused

specifically on the phenomenon of the singleton educator (Hagin 2020; Hansen, 2015; Loucks-Horsley et al., 2010; Loughran et al., 2012; Shulman, 1986). This chapter moves the reader closer to a better understanding of the context in which singletons work and how they describe their teaching experiences and needs in order to inform initiatives for more effective teacher professional development. This chapter also addresses my research question asking how singleton art teachers' shared meanings of singleton-ness might also inform initiatives to provide effective professional development for singleton arts educators. The following sections highlight characteristics and skills as they relate to the existing literature and the findings in this study, informing its analysis and discussion of the self-reliant singleton and what to do when you *don't know what you don't know*.

Characteristics, Skills, and Themes of Singleton-ness

The following discussion and analysis are organized according to the specific characteristics and themes being presented. I begin with a discussion of autonomy and how participants made meaning of this characteristic and the role freedom and responsibility play in their ability to navigate the singleton experience. Then, I explore the characteristics of isolation, time, and collaboration referencing how these characteristics have been explored in the literature and discuss how the participants in this study made meaning of their experiences with these characteristics of singleton-ness. I then analyze how participants' experiences with these characteristics led to the development of skills and identification of dispositions they value as part of their ability to survive as a singleton teacher. The chapter continues with a discussion of the self-reliant singleton and how participants described their self-reliance as a skill that allowed them to be successful in their demanding singleton environment and the implications this has for providing supports for "self-reliant" singleton educators. The discussion continues with an

exploration of the theme you *don't know what you don't know* and what happens when the self-reliant singleton educators discover they don't know what they don't know. The chapter ends with a conclusion summarizing the discussion and introducing chapter six, Implications and Recommendations.

Autonomy

Research literature has identified several characteristics of singleton teaching and teaching in general that are important to include in this discussion. Autonomy (Brunetti, 2001; Gaikwad & Brantely, 1982; Ingersoll, 1997; Kim & Loadman, 1994; Klecker & Loadman, 1996; Melenyzer, 1990; Pearson & Hall, 1993; Pearson and Moomaw, 2005; Perie & Baker, 1997; Short, 1994; Short & Rinehart 1992; Ulrikson, 1996) has been frequently studied in education research and was a topic of interest in the group panel discussion.

Participants described instances of freedom and responsibility, even stress and self-doubt, when sharing their experiences as singletons. Consistent with the literature, participants in this study described the autonomy they have as singleton art educators as being liberating (Gaikwad & Brantely, 1982) and empowering (Klecker & Loadman, 1996; Short & Rinehart 1992). Nora described the excitement of "the opportunity to teach the kids about the kinds of art that I'm excited about." Smith described how liberating it is to "kind of make your own world" and "create your own content." Marie liked being able to "go at my own pace," and Clover liked the liberty "to develop my own path." Nina described it as "magical." Participants also identified that with autonomy comes responsibility. Nina summed it up with, "I mean, it's a responsibility, but I am comfortable with being the one who has to call the shots." Mrs. Art added that it is "part of the joy and the hard work of being a singleton."

During the panel discussion, the shared meaning of their experience with autonomy was explored. Participants preferred that autonomy be included as a single characteristic, as both freedom and responsibility rather than as a pro or con. This is interesting, since even though participants described many instances of being overwhelmed by the responsibility that is associated with the autonomy of singleton-ness, they did not want to identify responsibility as a con but rather as another aspect of autonomy; like the ying to the yang of freedom. Two sides of the same coin that naturally exist together. Even Michael who, when describing autonomy, stated, "So, I kind of flip flop on that a little bit like, oh, it's so nice to have this freedom to create this custom curriculum for my kids, but on the other hand, it's so much work and it's constantly consuming me and I'm constantly, you know, overthinking it sometimes." However, she agreed with the group that autonomy should be listed as one characteristic. This finding is consistent with the literature identifying that singleton teachers' unique circumstances may produce different results when exploring the relationship between autonomy and stress/burnout, job satisfaction, motivation, professionalism, and empowerment; all constructs that have demonstrated to be linked to autonomy (Brunetti, 2001; Kim & Loadman, 1994; Klecker & Loadman, 1996; Pearson and Moomaw, 2005; Ulrikson, 1996).

What is also significant about this finding is the indication that singletons' desire for support and connectedness may not outweigh their desire for autonomy. Consistent in the participants' stories, in the spaces between their descriptions of their responsibilities and experiences as singletons, was a love of the freedom to create "magical", meaningful, art learning experiences for their students.

It is also important to point out that "Curriculum autonomy is also logically consistent with the examination of educational reform initiatives…especially because many argue that the

autonomy of teachers, one dimension of empowerment…is critical to any initiative's implementation and success" (Pearson and Moomaw, 2005, p. 49). Participants often described the challenges of locating information and developing their curriculum but balanced their responsibility for these tasks with the freedom to research, develop, and choose lessons that inspired them and provided meaningful art experiences for their students.

Repeatedly in their stories participants apologetically described their frustrations with curriculum development, the task not the content. They identified research skills, creativity, life-long learner, problem-solver, and resourcefulness as skills they had developed and valued as part of their singleton teaching experience. These skills along with enthusiasm, organization, self-motivation, and adaptability allowed them the ability to find "joy" and "excitement" in their autonomy.

Autonomy is part of what makes singleton-ness survivable. These singleton teachers have adapted to their teaching environments and used the skills that they naturally had or had developed over time to facilitate their teaching. Autonomy allows them to make the adjustments they need to facilitate their teaching and students' learning. Participants shared how they leaned into their strengths when developing their curriculum and sought information and resources to augment these strengths. They described times when they sought out content colleagues outside of school to solicit advice and training. All the participants identified times they accessed online resources and art teacher communities to gather information and glean support.

Teachers such as Clover, Marie, and Michael described that when their teaching appointments changed, they researched information and sought out resources to develop their programs. Smith and Nina, when entering a new teaching position, described the need to learn about the culture of their new district and its community. Nina described reaching out to

community members and fellow teachers to gain understanding of local Native American Indian culture so she could create meaningful lessons for her students. Without the autonomy to flex to the needs of the students and balance these needs with one's individual skills and available resources, the singleton teacher's experience would be much different. Autonomy allows singleton teachers the ability to adapt to their teaching environments and thrive.

Isolation

Essential to this discussion is the question: What happens when a singleton teacher does not have the skills, resources, and supports to adapt and thrive? Autonomy is not enough. Autonomy on its own can be isolating, stressful, and overwhelming. Structural isolation (Calabrese, 1986; Cookson, 2005; Flinders, 1988; Gaikwood & Brantly, 1992; Lortie, 1975; Robert 1973; Scheib, 2006), feelings of isolation (Calabreze, 1986; Flinders, 1988; Gaikwood & Brantley, 1992; Krueger 2003; Lorte, 1975; Palmer, 1998; Robert, 1973), demands of professional responsibilities (LaGarry & Richards, 2018; Scheib, 2006), adaptive isolation (response to feeling overwhelmed by job demands) (Lorte, 1975), collegial isolation (Barley & Brigham, 2008; Dos Santos 2019; LaGarry & Richard, 2018; McDonough, Gildersleeve, & Jarsky, 2010; McHenry-Sorber, et al. 2019; Weiner, 2006), professional isolation (Burtan, Brown & Johnson, 2013), and loneliness (Neito, 2003; Sindberg, 2011) have all been documented in the literature.

Singleton teachers, in addition to the more studied reasons "general education" teachers are isolated, are isolated because of the specialization of the subject they teach (Scheib, 2006; Sindberg, 2011). Mrs. Art, Clover, and Marie all described instances of having another teacher or mentor to look to early in their careers for advice and guidance. They described the value they found in this resource and how it transitioned them into having the skills they needed to navigate

singleton-ness. Marie lamented how difficult she fears it will be for another novice teacher to replace her in a couple years when she retires. She noted that without the support of a mentor or colleague teacher who can share skills of singleton-ness and tips on how to manage job responsibilities, a novice teacher moving into her position will have a much more difficult transition into teaching than she had. Marie stated,

> I think, luckily for me. Once I became the sole art teacher, I already had experience. It was very helpful when I first started teaching to have someone else there. An experienced person to ask questions to, a mentor, just even for procedures and things like that. Of course, everybody kinda does their own thing… but just to, you know, when you are brand new starting out, it is overwhelming the whole, you know, everything about school. Um, so, I think it was okay because I had kinda established my own routines and my own stuff by the time I was the only one here but, you know, it is always good to have somebody else to talk to about things and just… their expertise in different areas.

She continued, "So, I feel like, you know, this is setting up a disaster for whoever is going to be coming in, you know, just …even if they have experience teaching. It's just overwhelming, you'd have to learn all the kids' names, you see the whole school, you know, it's just, it's overwhelming. I mean, I'm managing because I have a lot of things under my belt already. And I can, you know, add what I need to, but if I didn't, it would be crazy. It really would. It would be a lot."

Mrs. Art, although she shared her fear that if she asked questions she would be seen as unknowledgeable, carefully watched the veteran teacher she worked with early in her career to learn skills and prepare herself for singleton teaching. Clover identified that having experiences with Marie as a mentor when she started teaching helped prepare her for moving to the high school where she became a singleton in her discipline, middle school art and ceramics. Michael described that having another art teacher in the building was not enough to make her not feel isolated. Her content colleague taught advanced art courses and had little understanding of

elementary art and curriculum. Michael has a degree in curriculum and interest and enthusiasm

for creating a strong art program at her school, but still described the challenges and isolation she

has felt as an art content specialist. For her, autonomy comes at a price. Recall she stated, "I kind

of flip flop on that a little bit like, oh, it's so nice to have this freedom to create this custom

curriculum for my kids, but on the other hand, it's so much work and it's constantly consuming

me and I'm constantly, you know, overthinking it sometimes. And I probably make way too

much work for myself going back and forth. Whereas if I had someone to work with, we could

kind of split that up a little bit."

Other aspects of isolation reported were also consistent with the existing literature.

Structural isolation (Calabrese, 1986; Cookson, 2005; Flinders, 1988; Gaikwood & Brantly,

1992; Lortie, 1975; Robert 1973; Scheib, 2006) was reported by Marie, Clover, Nina, Smith,

Michael and Mrs. Art. Clover and Mrs. Art's classrooms were both located in the "fine arts

wing" of their buildings away from the general education classrooms. Nina's classroom was in a

hallway, by itself, off the cafeteria and Smith's classroom was in an outbuilding, as was

Michael's classroom for a number of years. Some teachers described adaptations they made to

feel less isolated. Smith makes it a point to walk the halls of the main school building in the

morning when students are arriving to see the students and other staff members. Nina and Nora

identified seeking out colleagues to collaborate with. Others, such as Michael and Marie

participate in clubs and school activities to be part of the school and community.

Time

Limitations such as time (Anderson & Harris, 1997; Cookson, 2005; Dodor & Hausafus,

2010; Flinders, 1988; Gray, Mitchell, & Tarter, 2014; Guskey, 2003; Hansen, 2015; Lortie,

1975; Newman, 2019) and time management are a hindrance to teacher collaboration and

professional development (Beer & Beer, 1992; Boyle, Borg, Falzon, & Baglioni, A. J., 1995;

Flinders, 1988; Lortie, 1975; Montalvo, A., Bair, & Boor, 1995; Solman & Feld, 1989). All the

teachers reported time as a challenge to their interactions with others and participation in

professional development. Time, along with job demands (Flinders, 1988) and scheduling

(Lieberman & Miller, 1992; Lortie, 1975; Sindberg & Lipscomb, 2005; Scheib, 2006) were

identified as characteristics of singleton-ness and evident in participants' stories.

Time away from the classroom is particularly difficult when you are a specialty content

teacher who has limited scheduled time with students. Elementary art students may only have art

once in a four-day rotation. If a singleton teacher is absent for one instructional day, he/she will

not see those students for eight consecutive days. Middle school students, like at Cowtown, have

art instruction daily but only for ten weeks. Participants described time away and lack of content

knowledgeable substitute teachers as reasons it is difficult to take time away from the classroom

for professional development. Preparation of materials and instructions for lessons were also

described as deterrent for taking time away from the classroom. Marie explained,

> At school, the predicament at school is, it is really hard to leave for the day. With
> the lack of subs, setting up things for a sub, it is pretty much a waisted day
> because there really isn't much I can have the sub do that is following what we
> are already doing. So, it is just a lot of free time, and you know one day projects.
> Then I feel like that gets me off track. We need to keep moving along. So, I find it
> really hard to take the time to go to Art Leadership and other conferences and
> stuff like that. I just feel like I am missing so much here, it is just not easy to do. It
> is sometime easier to just stay here. You know. Unfortunately. With the sub
> situation now, it could be a TA coming in and I feel bad for them.

Michael stated, "And I hate that because it's like my kids are missing out on their art

experience that day. It's like a throwaway day." Mrs. Art noted she "wasn't willing to give up a

ton of time…Because your curriculum suffers, and your students suffer. And you know, they

need you there. And so, it's a double-edged sword, it really is." Clover and Nina both described

having trouble leaving her students in the hands of a substitute teacher and having "sub guilt." Smith and Nora both explained that they have adjusted to the reality that their students might have a "wasted day" depending upon the sub situation. Smith stated that the need for PD and contact time with other art teachers has outweighed the challenges of being away. She explained, "I have learned that I get more out of those PD days. Not only like, mentally, doing something different, but the amount that happens in one day in the classroom is not going to make or break what is going on. But it has taken me a long time to be like yeah, I am going to take a day to go do PD. Because collaborating and getting to do all of those things is so beneficial. Just to get away and come back with fresh eyes, so like, 'oh, let's try this'. It's like a fresh breath of air." The balancing of time, responsibility, and need for professional development opportunities will be discussed further later in this chapter.

Collaboration

Need for or lack of collaboration is another topic often mentioned in literature (Colbert and Wolff, 1992; Lieberman and Miller 2008; Mawhinney, 2008; Rogers and Babinski, 2002; Sindberg, 2011). Participants described the difficulty in finding common time to collaborate with content peers across their districts. Only Appleton provided regularly scheduled common planning time in the form of an art content PLC among art teachers across the district. Both the Appleton teachers, Nina and Mrs. Art, described the PLC as a positive to their singleton experience. Mrs. Art, recently retired, described when the PLC was implemented as part of a curriculum development initiative. At that time, the meeting times were organized by a district provided curriculum coordinator and Mrs. Art described her as "very helpful." The curriculum coordinator assigned the group tasks to carry out and deadlines for completion. Having concrete objectives and goals made the group productive. After the curriculum alignment was completed

and the curriculum coordinator left, the group still met and planned their own initiatives as a department. Over time, and with faculty changes, the PLC's objectives became less focused.

Nina, who is in her second year at Appleton, described how grateful she was that her district still supports regular art PLC meetings since her school building is away from the main district campus. Without this common, required PLC time, she would not see her district content peers on a regular basis. She described the current meeting structure as collegial but not focused or productive. Others, Michael, Clover, Marie, Nora, and Smith described monthly special area meetings and superintendent days as the times when they can meet with their content peers. All the participants indicated that if they asked for it, they would probably be allowed to schedule additional meeting times throughout the year for in-house professional development or curriculum work. Scheduling conflicts, job demands, and time were all listed as reasons for not meeting more frequently.

There are multiple factors at play when it comes to common meeting time for singleton art content peers. First, in small districts with singleton content teachers, even if they are teaching the same specialty subject (art) each teacher is typically teaching different grade levels. Apart from Appleton with two elementary schools, the other districts had one teacher for each building or set of grade levels, elementary, middle, and high school with some teachers working across grade levels as needed to fill out the schedule. Additionally, as supported by participants' stories singleton teachers, even if they have content peer in the district, may not be in the same building making it difficult to meet during the school day. Unless the district assigned a designated meeting time, like Appleton, participants reported having difficulty making time to meet with content peers after school due to other school related responsibilities, such as clubs, students staying after school to work on projects, lesson preparation and grading. Monthly

department meetings, which included other special area teachers, were reported as a time to share department related district information and as Clover reported a time for chairs to collect and report feedback to the administration.

Significantly, Mrs. Art and Nina reported advantages to their district assigning a weekly "PLC" meeting time. This time was valued by Mrs. Art as a designated time her and her art colleagues could plan initiatives relating to their shared discipline. At first, the PLC was supported by a curriculum coordinator who helped the group set goals and focus on specific objectives such as realigning the arts program to meet the new N.Y.S. Visual and Performing Arts Standards. When the curriculum coordinator left, the group continued setting their own goals and initiatives, however, reportedly less successfully without outside support and help with goal setting and time keeping. Nina, who is new to the district, reported that she appreciated the opportunity to regularly get together with her content peers, but described these meetings as non-productive when it came to content sharing, curriculum planning and alignment. This may be due to changes in the art faculty since Mrs. Art was teaching at Appleton, and/or changes in the group's understanding of the purpose of these meeting times.

These singletons, without support and guidance, may have reverted to a self-reliant mentality when it comes to managing their personal teaching responsibilities. Nina reported evidence of this when she described instances of when she tried to reach out to the other art teachers for support, collaboration, and mentorship. She stated, "as a whole, we're probably extremely strong but again, it's that whole, you know, everybody's busy. Everybody's doing their own thing. We're all in our own little world. And that's part of it. I think we're all in our own little world. So how do you get out of your own little world and become a collaborative group when on a day-to-day basis you're on your own?" She continued,

I think because everyone here is a singleton art teacher. That component of communication is kind of like feathered away or whispered away or whatever. And it's been difficult. Like, I feel like I'm the one pushing a lot to be like, hey, let's do something together. Hey, let's figure this out. Hey, you know, let's, let's try to do this together. And a lot of times, it's, you know, teachers going oh, okay. Because they haven't had to do it in a long time.

Nina is new to the district but is not new to teaching. She recognized how her content colleagues have adapted to a self-reliant (Lorte, 1075) mentality and shared her frustration with breaking though this mindset to encourage her colleagues to collaborate.

Other participants described not having time or planning time to meet as content teams. Some, such as Michael, reported that her advanced art colleague simply had no interest in or experience with elementary aged students. Marie described the "distance" between her and her middle school and high school colleagues. For her the physical space and developmental needs of her students created a barrier between her and her colleagues and their ability to have meaningful collaboration. Clover, Smith, Mrs. Art, and Nora all reported that although they had art colleagues, their colleagues taught different mediums and courses leaving them on their own to develop curriculum and lessons pertaining to their specific courses and content. All the participants reported seeking out online resources and support for their specific content areas on their own, away from school and their district peers.

Survival Skills

It is important to the discussion of singleton-ness and professional development needs and supports to identify that new teachers who are entering the field as singletons need mentors who share their content specialty and ideally understand singleton-ness. Many studies identified that isolation in teaching leads to feelings of extreme helplessness and burnout (Carlson & Thomas, 2006; Gaikwad & Brantley, 1992; Gordon, 2000; Hamann, 1990; Kilgore & Griffin 1998; Krueger, 2000; Neveu, 2007; Rosenberg, O'Shea & O'Shea 1998; Scheib, 2006) and

attrition (Gordon, 2000; Hamann, 1990; Krueger, 2000; Scheib, 2006). Knowledge of skills and dispositions that successful singleton teachers naturally have or have developed over time can inform hiring decisions and the implementation of supports for teachers who are hired to teach as singleton.

Participants in this study shared examples of times when they needed such support and the efforts they made to find these resources for themselves. They shared examples of using their interpersonal skills and communication to find cross-curricular colleagues to collaborate with and communication skills they used to advocate for their programs and for themselves. They described how they implemented routines and used their organizational skills to help navigate their job (Flinders, 1988) and scheduling (Lieberman & Miller, 1992; Lortie, 1975; Sindberg & Lipscomb, 2005; Scheib, 2006) demands. They described how being creative and adaptable helped them adjust and use their creative thinking skills to problem solve and invent practical solutions to the challenges of singleton-ness. Mrs. Art described creating a system to hide away materials under the classroom tables so she could pull things out and tuck them away again easily between classes, "like Vanna White" on Wheel of Fortune. Marie described having routines that the children learned over the years that helped the students become more independent in her classroom and her classroom management easier. Singleton teachers must be resourceful and self-sufficient, but it is problematic if this self-sufficiency isolates them from others.

Lortie (1975) warns of the "self-reliant" mentality that teachers can develop if they do not have the support they need when they begin teaching. Participants in this study identified self-advocacy, self-reliant, self-reflection, self-starter, self-motivated, and program-advocacy all as skills that re part of their singleton experience. It is not that these skills and dispositions are

bad—they are, in fact good, even essential. However, they are also an indication of the self-reliant mentality Lorte (1975) warns us about. This is an important observation because it has implications for singletons' willingness to participate in professional development offerings. Knowledge of dispositions for self-reliance are important when considering what and how to plan professional development programming for singletons. One must ask what specifically do educators like these need in support of their existing resources and skills, and what can we offer that they struggle to *find for themselves*?

The Self-Reliant Singleton

It is important to understand the mindset of the self-reliant singleton. The teachers I interviewed were all dedicated, knowledgeable, creative visual arts educators. They all expressed deep affinity for the communities that they work in and an appreciation for the relationships they have developed with their students, community members, and colleagues. They often described their school community as a family and shared examples of when they had been proud of the work they did or the times they felt like their teaching had made a difference in the lives of their students. Participants identified that these moments, along with smaller class sizes and being able to get to know "everyone", as advantages of teaching in a small district. They also described the many responsibilities that come along with being the only one. The only one to prepare and hang artwork, the only one to learn all the names of all the students in your building, the only one to help students prepare portfolios for college applications, the only contact for art related activities in the community, the only one who understands your curriculum, the only one to promote your program, the only one to stand up for yourself, the only one.

The demands of teaching a specialty content area and the demands of program development and advocacy can foster a mindset of self-reliance in singletons. Nora stated,

"There's no division of labor when you're a singleton. You're doing everything and there's no way around it." Smith noted, "we're the ones that do the job of a million things, art shows, display cases, all the things." Marie added, "So yeah, that as far as being a singleton makes it even harder, because you're the only person there and you got to pick up the slack." Clover stated, "I find some frustration sometimes being asked to…, you get spread a little thin being the only person or a singleton or two of us, if there is something in the community." And Michael added, "Yeah, I think that's really the Achilles heel, is just taking all of it on by yourself and not being able to share that weight with anybody else." Nina stated, the demands of the job and "being the only one here" has been "stressful."

Self-reliance is a natural response when one has an important job to do and no one else is going to do it for you, or perhaps even knows what it is that you do. Participants reported that they did not feel like their colleagues or administration understood or at times valued the content they teach. Marie stated, "Nobody else really understands exactly what teaching art is like" and art is "alone in its way of doing things." Mrs. Art described not getting critical feedback from her administrator. She stated, "Well, the singleton experience is definitely unique, you're alone, are responsible for creating, for implementing, critiquing, and reflecting on your own content, as well as the success of the lessons. There's really… I did not have a lot of feedback that I felt was really critical and constructive, that truly identified good or bad features of the lesson, and its implementation." Michael also shared her frustration with her administrators not having interest in or knowledge of her content stating, "I feel like when being a singleton like, my administrators know nothing. Like if I ask them a question about the arts pathway, or the standards, they know absolutely nothing. And they'll say that, they'll lead with that." In addition to not feeling like their content was understood, others expressed the feeling that their art content area was

undervalued. Nina stated, "the arts aren't as valued as a lot of other things." Smith also commented that she felt like when she was talking with other teachers that "art teacher" wasn't as "valued." Lack of value or understanding of art content was discussed during the panel discussion. The discussion was focused on *Lack of Understanding of Art Content* and *Lack of Respect for Art Content Discipline* needed to be both included in art specific characteristics. The discussion concluded with all agreeing that not understanding art content does not mean that one does not value it necessitating both categories. What is significant about the perceived value of one's discipline is that if singleton teachers perceive that their content specialty is not valued, then this could add to their feelings of isolation and necessity for self-reliance.

Participants did describe adaptations they had made within their teaching environments that helped them navigate feelings of isolation by seeking out singletons in other content areas. Marie described her "lunch bunch" of singleton music, technology, and library teachers that met daily. She shared how this group served as a community for one another. Even though their content areas were different, they shared other challenges such as their busy schedules and being responsible for teaching all the students in the building. Marie stated, "We do discuss a lot of school related things at that time. So that has been very nice to have a common lunch time so we can actually meet with each other. We share the same classes (students) we share the same schedule, so it is nice to, it helps to not feel so isolated." Michael and Nina also described seeking out other singleton non-art content colleagues for support. Understanding that singletons across disciplines can support one another as they navigate the challenges of singleton-ness is an important finding and worth noting when creating community among faculty members. Administrators in small districts should recognize that their singleton teachers need a community of supportive colleagues who share aspects of their singleton teaching experience. Not as an

afterthought when planning professional development, but as a comprehensive focus on singleton specific professional development or opportunities for gathering that fosters community among their singleton educators and addresses challenges specific to the singleton experience. Marie shared how happy she was that she and her singleton colleagues shared a common lunch time. Without this common time in their schedule, they would not have the benefit of their daily thirty minutes of companionship and support. She noted that they have not always had a common lunch time and hopes that next year's schedule will continue to allow for this daily time together.

Being able to share your experiences as a singleton with other singleton educators can help offset feelings of isolation and self-reliance. Singletons can form communities across disciplines and support one another within districts. These communities need to be fostered and supported by administration in order to be effective. Whether it requires creating schedules that allow for singletons to seek each other out at lunch time for community building and support, or PLC's that encourage cross-curricular initiatives which bring singletons together working towards shared objectives that support their common professional development needs, administrators need to recognize that singletons need a sense of community and value within their working environment.

The self-reliant rural art singleton has learned how to navigate singleton-ness using the skills they possess or have developed over time. They embrace the responsibility that comes with autonomy because they value the "joy" and "excitement" of teaching despite the "hard work of being a singleton." They are eager to share the "kinds of art" they are "excited about" and value the liberty "to develop their own path(s)" and "create their own content." The self-reliant nature of singleton-ness for these educators is born out of responsibility, strength, and an ability to

adapt to their teaching environment. Understanding singletons' predisposition for the characteristic of self-reliance is important to the development and implementation of professional development initiatives designed to meet the needs of these dedicated educators. The demands of singleton teaching are unlike those experienced by teams of content teachers, where content and teaching tasks can be shared. The "only one" self-reliant characteristics of singleton-ness have implications when singleton teachers make choices about participation in professional development initiatives. The value of the PD must outweigh the challenges of being away from the classroom. Like the freedom of autonomy outweighs the responsibility of singleness. Again, the challenge is determining what can be offered to the self-reliant singleton that they struggle to *find for themselves*?

You *Don't Know What You Don't Know*

What was also evident was how dedicated and focused these teachers were on their responsibilities as singleton visual arts teachers and being their students only in school art influence. As described earlier in this chapter, the autonomy of singleton teaching comes with responsibility. At times participants shared their concern that students were only learning what they know as artist and teachers. They described worrying that they tend to stay within their "comfort zone or personal areas of art interests and influence. One theme that emerged from participants stories was when they described instances of feeling like they "don't know what they don't know."

Each participant described a time when they felt like there was something they should know that they didn't know, or they needed to know and did not have the connections or resources to access the information they needed. For the self-reliant singleton these were times of isolation and frustration. Nora described,

You sometimes don't know you don't know something until you hear about it from someone else. And then, I'm like, why did no one tell me about this earlier? Like the first example, the sketchbooks, that you can put them in as a textbook order. We didn't have that initially and I was figuring out how to do it from my budget. And I was really stressing my budget and then when I found out through my teacher network. I was like, how did we not know this, how did we not know that we can do this? So, just finding something out and then finding out that other art teachers have known about it for years, sometimes, like, oh my God. This could have saved me so much trouble.

Here Nora describes something as simple as knowing about ways to get resources, sketch books, for her students without having to use the money from her materials budget. She described how in that moment of discovery she felt frustrated that this was not something she already knew and why hadn't anyone, her administrator, told her. Nora, who actively advocates for her program and her students, who prides herself in being pro-active, responsible, and resourceful, in that moment felt frustration with not knowing what she didn't know. Nora stated, "I'm like, if I'm going to do something, I'm going to do something well" and "I don't like feeling like I am failing at something."

For Smith, not knowing what you don't know emerged as a theme when she spoke of being new to the area and her need to find a local arts network to access information. She stated, "I just want to know who is out there. Who can I lean on? I want to know, does this already exist and how do I get involved" and "… I just want to know everything, because I want to know how it works, so I know what the best use of my time is." She knew that to be successful and to build her sculpture program at South Jr/Sr High School she needed to find out what she didn't know about arts programming in New York schools. She described feeling confident in her skills as a teacher and artist, but knew she needed to make connections within the arts teaching community outside of her district in order to access information and resources for her students and program; she needed to know what she didn't know.

Marie described her concern with "staying in her comfort zone." She explained, "You know, the students are getting my experiences, my ideas, but, you know, in art, especially, there's so many ways you can accomplish a learning standard that I feel like that is missing, that they're not getting several different ways of accomplishing it. They're just getting one way." She concluded that, "as a singleton you're just relying on yourself." Here Marie identified her concern that her students were not getting access to information she didn't know since she is her students' only Pre-K through sixth grade art teacher. Not having an elementary content colleague to share the responsibility of developing lessons that expose the students to a variety of art mediums and styles created feelings of feelings of stress and isolation for Marie when it came to reflecting upon the variety of perspectives and experiences she could offer her students as a self-reliant singleton teacher.

Clover stated, "If you don't have it, you don't miss it in a way." Here she was referring to not having a content partner, someone to collaborate with. She continued stating, "My first year and a half, I was very isolated. And just really leaning on my methods classes from SU and my workshops, and I was building the complete plane while I was flying it. And I think we all do that. I think you just have a few tools in your toolbox. You have a few projects in your tool belt, and you hopefully got some good experience management wise in your placements to know some of the fires, how to put them out." Clover described how she relied upon the "tools" she had from her pre-service teacher training to get her through her early days of teaching. She referenced not missing what you don't have. Looking back, she recognized that there were times she didn't know what she didn't know. She relied upon what she did know while "building her plane" as a self-reliant singleton.

Michael also described instances of feeling like she didn't know what she didn't know.

She described that as a singleton she is worried about "missing out on something major." She

recalled when the district had a curriculum coordinator, she could rely upon to keep her "in the

know." This void she identified as a characteristic of singleton-ness, she stated, "I think because

I'm a singleton, I just don't have that community." She continued, "What's unique to a singleton

is that we're kind of like a one man show, we have to make decisions based on, you know, our

own professional opinion, sometimes. Without feedback from others, we have to trust ourselves

to kind of be the representative of our program. We don't have anything to compare to. Which is

unique." Michael described times in her experience when her district had an arts minded

administrator and curriculum coordinator who helped her access information. She felt more

connected and "in the know" with these supports. When the administration changed these

supports were no longer available to her and she again worried about what she didn't know she

didn't know.

Mrs. Art, a veteran art teacher, described wishing she knew more about ways to access

information about local artists and art offerings. She stated, "I know some things. I was missing

the knowledge of resources within the district community. And within the surrounding city. I

wish I had knowledge or a list or something a working website or something that featured, you

know, this person is a ceramist." Although she had worked hard to develop opportunities for her

students and had learned how to be resourceful and self-reliant, she still lamented not having

access to information that she didn't know she didn't know. Nina provided this example, "So, for

example, the past two years in May I do an art show featuring strawberries. Strawberries are very

important here. We do a whole art show, the whole school does something with strawberries, and

then I take it to the local library, and I put it all up in there. But I didn't know that until I talked to

someone here noting that everybody seems to have strawberries on something, cups and stuff like that, they're like, super important. I'm like, but again, you don't know what you don't know."

What is important to recognize when exploring the theme of 'you don't know what you don't know" is that for the self-reliant singleton this feeling of "not knowing" creates feelings of isolation, frustration, and dissatisfaction when they are trying to balance the freedom and responsibility of their singleton-ness. These singleton educators accept the responsibility that comes with the freedom to create and teach their arts content. They rely upon their creative, resourceful skills to research and develop curriculum that provides quality lessons and art experiences for their students. Having to navigate this responsibility as a singleton without in-district resources and content colleagues is challenging.

Each of the singletons in this study agreed that not knowing what they don't know was a theme of their collective experience as singletons. Additionally, not knowing what you don't know is often experienced outside of the lotus of their control. These singletons have used and developed skills to help them navigate their singleton-ness. Many of the characteristics of singleton-ness, autonomy, only one (job demands, content specialist, content influence), isolation, etc. lead to singletons developing a self-reliant mindset. Participants in this study described their self-reliance as both "the joy and the hard work" of singleton-ness. They accept that since they are the only one, they must work hard to create the experiences they want for their students. They described many examples of researching and finding their own resources and information to develop their curriculum and provide the resources their students need. They described examples of finding such out-of-district resources and organizations to access other content specialists for support and curriculum materials.

These singletons described times, despite their best "self-reliant" efforts, they discovered that they didn't know what they didn't know. In these moments the self-reliant singleton realizes the limitations of his/her self-reliance. They encounter the need for additional support to access information, opportunities, and resources. Michael and Nora both described times when they had a curriculum coordinator who would alert them when there were arts related opportunities available that they might not have heard about. They described feeling less isolated from this information, knowing that someone else was helping them stay connected to outside resources. Smith described how she is actively seeking out PD and resources that will help her make connections to the Central New York arts community so she can develop relationships and access to information and opportunities to grow her program. When considering the needs of singleton educators, understanding the singleton phenomenon and the nature of their experiences is necessary to inform the planning of professional development initiatives. Exploring the theme of *you don't know what you don't know* has "constructed a picture" (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007) of the singleton experience that identifies the need for access to information and resources related to singletons' content specialty. This access can facilitate a network to connect singletons to resources and information they need and struggle to find on their own.

Conclusions

In this chapter I have discussed the information found in the spaces between the characteristics of the phenomenon of singleton-ness and the skills necessary to function in this environment. I have analyzed how singletons navigate their singleton-ness as experienced in the context of the rural singleton art educator and identified several characteristics of the singleton experience and skills singletons possess or have developed over time to help them adapt to their singleton environment. I began with a discussion of characteristics of the singleton phenomenon

identified by participants referencing how these findings relate to the existing literature. I focused the report of my analysis on findings that were particularly significant to my problem statement regarding the gap in research focused specifically on the phenomenon of the singleton educator (Hagin 2020; Hansen, 2015; Loucks-Horsley et al., 2010; Loughran et al., 2012; Shulman, 1986). I did this in order to attain a better understanding of the context in which singletons work and how they describe their teaching experiences and needs, and to present how the meanings singleton art teachers share in common can inform initiatives to provide more effective professional development for singleton arts educators.

The discussion and analysis identified that many of the characteristics of the phenomenon of singleton-ness that singleton rural art teachers experienced are consistent with the findings of the literature review and existing research in this area. What is significant in this study is how these characteristics relate to the skills singleton art teachers develop to navigate their singleton-ness and what we can learn from these adaptations. When I introduced this chapter, I described the spaces in-between the characteristics and skills, the places where participants described how they survive and thrive in their singleton environments. Descriptions of the "joy and hard work" of being a singleton. In these spaces participants described how they accepted the responsibility of the autonomy of their singleton-ness valuing the "magical, creative" freedom of being able to develop "exciting" art experiences for their students.

Participants chose to have autonomy listed as a single characteristic rather than a pro or con. They discussed how with freedom comes responsibility and that for them this experience is not a have or have not, pro or con, but rather two sides of the same coin existing together. The give and take of freedom and responsibility, autonomy, as a characteristic of singleton-ness allows singleton educators the room to adjust to the context of their singleton experience.

Singletons are faced with significant challenges in their working environments. Time, isolation, resources, job demands, scheduling, class sizes, teaching multiple levels of students in one class period, and value for content are all examples of the challenges singleton teachers may face.

The singleton teachers in this study identified several skills and dispositions they possessed or developed as part of their singleton experience. These skills helped them perform in their singleton environments—skills such as organization and developing routines, resourcefulness and adaptability, communication skills and creative problem-solving, and learning how to set boundaries. They described being self-reflective, self-starters, self-motivated, self-advocates and advocates for their students and programs. In their stories the self-reliant mindset of the singleton emerged as a common theme. Lorte (1975) raised concern for the development of a self-reliant attitude among new educators who did not have support, mentorship, when they entered teaching. Similarly, for singletons self-reliance is a product of their environment. Singletons are the only content specialist in their building or district. They do not have content colleagues with whom to share job responsibilities or to collaborate with. They are lone educators singularly navigating the demands of their teaching environment. These educators rely upon their own skills and dispositions to help them navigate their job demands. They, often independently, seek out the support and resources they need to provide quality educational experiences for their students.

The singletons interviewed in this study also described enthusiasm, compassion, confidence, and humor as skills they associate with their singleton-ness. They were apologetic when they described the challenges of singleton-ness. They identified that the benefits of a small community outweighed the challenges. Self-reliance for these singletons is a skill that allows them to perform in their environments and provide the learning experiences they wish for their

students. When these self-reliant singletons were faced with instances of not knowing what they don't know, they described feelings of frustration and isolation. They shared their concern that because they *don't know what they don't know* that this could lead to missed opportunities for their students and programs. These moments, when self-reliance is not enough, are when singletons expressed the need for additional support and content specific collaboration. A community of content peers and access to resources and information that they themselves cannot easily find.

Autonomy allows the singleton educator to adapt to their singleton working environment and make professional decisions about the use of resources and development of curriculum that is best suited to the needs of students and program development. Singletons accept the responsibility that comes with the freedom of autonomy and embrace the hard work of singleton-ness. Self-reliance is a natural occurrence in the singleton environment. Singletons do not have a "team" to rely upon to share the workload and responsibility of providing quality learning experiences for their students in their given content specialty. Singleton educators, to meet the demands of their profession, become self-reliant in their advocating, researching, teaching and promoting of their discipline they stated, "you are the only one."

Providing professional development opportunities and support for singleton educators requires thoughtful consideration of the characteristics of their singleton experience and the context in which they work. Singletons are dedicated educators who assume the responsibility for their content and programs without the support of other content specialists in their building or district. They are the "only ones that do what they do." They pride themselves on their ability to adapt to the needs of their students and learning communities and they work hard to balance their time and work responsibilities to provide quality learning experiences for their students. Because

of their job demands and limited contact time with students, these singleton art teachers found it difficult to participate in professional development. Those who did participate in professional development offerings described how the need for these experiences outweighed the time away from their students. This is an important part of the larger picture of how to support singleton educators. One must identify what resources and supports the self-reliant singleton needs.

To better support singleton educators and provide the resources and information they need, professional development initiatives must be designed with the characteristics of the singleton phenomenon in mind. Additionally, the professional development initiatives must recognize the self-reliant nature of the singleton educator and target supports and resources singletons cannot provide for themselves. Supports such as access to content specialists in their field. Establishing a network of content specific educators who share the singleton experience that can collaborate with one another in curriculum development and program initiatives for their students. Providing access to information regarding local resources and events that would support their teaching and exploring ways to offer these opportunities at times that would not take away from regular instructional time with students.

In conclusion, chapter six explores participant responses to the question what wants and needs do you have as a singleton art educator. Participants identified several recommendations for the planning of professional development programming and resources that would facilitate their needs as singleton art educators. These needs, along with this new understanding of the characteristics of the singleton phenomenon and how singletons navigate the singleton teaching environment inform a discussion on the implications of singleton-ness, self-reliance, and what to do when you don't know what you don't know, inform the recommendations presented in chapter six. Additionally, chapter six presents recommendations for professional development

targeted at singleton art educators' needs and the needs of singletons in general,

acknowledgement of the limitations of this study, and recommendations for future research.

Chapter 6: Serving the Needs of the Self-reliant Singleton

The literature on professional development warns that initiatives that do not include the input of participants in planning and decision making often fail when they are mandated from the top-down (Hargreaves & Dawe, 1990; Ingersoll & Alsalam, 1997; Pearson & Moomaw, 2005; Tye & Tye 1984); are inconsistent and haphazard (Pomson, 2005); or are perceived (by participants) as contrived congeniality (Hargreaves, 1994). This chapter addresses the research question, how can the shared meaning of singleton-ness inform initiatives to provide professional development for singleton arts educators. This chapter presents the wants and needs of the singleton rural art educators interviewed in this study along with a discussion of the implications and recommendations for how to provide professional development services and programming to meet their identified needs. Following the presentation of implications and recommendations for professional development, is a discussion of the limitations of the study and recommendations for further research. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the broader implications of the research findings, recommendations for future research and analysis, and plans for next steps.

Identifying Singletons' Wants and Needs

At the conclusion of the third interview, participants were asked to identify their wants and needs as singleton educators. Participants identified items that they, as self-reliant singletons, struggle to find access to for themselves. This list along with an understanding of the characteristics of the singleton-ness and singleton teachers' contextual experiences can inform initiatives to support singleton educators. The following is a discussion of participants' wants and recommendations for how to plan initiatives to provide for these needs. Participants identified the following wants:

- Common planning time with content peers for curriculum development and team building
- Hands-on content specific professional development
- Art opportunities for students
- Local art teacher network across districts
- Online resources for local art opportunities and lesson exemplars
- Access to content specialists for help with processes and technical questions
- Resource lending library

Common Planning Time

Participants identified common planning time, across district, with their content collegues as something they want added to their singleton teaching expreince. Many participants identified that they do not have common planning time or in-district professional development time designated exclusively to meeting with their content peers. Appleton was the only district that provided weekly PLC time for all teachers to meet with their content colleagues. The other participants described monthly department meetings that included all "special area" teachers such as music, physical education, and library, etc. This time, however, was not designated for PLC type initiatives, but rather a time to diseminate information and plan shared events such as arts shows and performances. Although the PLC at Appleton started out as a productive PLC with the support of a district curriculum coordinator, the PLC time has now "feathered away" to being a time of the contrived congeniality Hargreaves (1994) described. Productive PLCs require organized objectives and goals. Mrs. Art and Nina, both teachers in Appleton CSD, described how happy they were to have this time to meet with their content peers simply as a time to stay connected, but wished it was more focused on common goals. Designated meeting time is a first step in providing the kind of support singletons need. The next step is to organize "PLC" or coming planning time towards objectives that meet the needs of the group. Both Nina and Mrs. Art requested team building initiatives for this group; opportunities for these singletons to find

their common ground, personally, professionally, and across grade levels developmentally. Building community among singleton educators across grade levels is another step towards meaningful collaboration. Planning Pre-K through twelfth grade curriculum alignment, program goal setting, mentorship programming between grade levels, shared events such as art shows and visiting artists, are all ways districtwide art content colleagues can find common ground for collaboration and team building. These initiatives when planned and executed together can help the singleton educator feel less isolated and overwhelmed by the disconnect between what they want to be able to do and what they can accomplish alone. Additionally, district-wide teams of singletons can pool resources and information broadening the scope of their experience, sharing skills, styles, and influences.

Hands-on, Content Specific, Professional Development

The next identified want was for hands-on, content specific professional development. Whether a singleton is an art educator or a specialist in another area, content specific professional development is essential for educators to stay up to date and informed in content knowledge. Singletons need to interact with others who are proficient in their content specialty to develop their content knowledge and inspire their teaching. Participants identified that being able to access hands-on training to acquire skills and information about art forms and materials would add to their knowledge base and inspire learning experiences they could provide for their students. All the participants identified that this was something they would like to have dedicated time to participate in and add to their learning and teaching experience.

Additionally, such hands-on, content specific professional development must be practical for teachers to adapt and implement in their own classrooms. Teachers described great hands-on PD experiences they had that were fun for themselves as artists, but not practical or age

appropriate for implementation in their teaching environment. PD planning initiatives that include skills and technique training must consider how these resources and skills will transfer to the participants' teaching environment. How can hands-on, content skills and knowledge based professional development be designed to meet teachers' classroom environments and students' developmental needs? Hands-on content specific professional development should be designed according to the grade levels teachers teach and require materials teachers readily have available or can practically access.

This does not mean that teachers should not attend PD that pushes the boundaries of their skills or the skills of their students, however, such PD should provide time for discussion and planning among participants for how to implement this new learning into the classroom environment when possible. Recommendations for such programming include creating PD that engages teachers in hands-on, content specific training that first engages the development of their skills and professional content knowledge (PCK) than allows teachers time to break into groups according to the grade levels they teach and discuss and plan ways this knew knowledge can be implemented in their classrooms. Other supports for such programming might include prepared scaffolded lesson plans and exemplars incorporating this new learning (PCK) at appropriate grade levels for classroom implementation that grade level teachers can explore and practice together.

Art Opportunities for Students

Another want identified by participants was art opportunities for their students. Participants reported limited arts related opportunities for their students outside of school, limiting students' ability to seek out arts learning beyond what could be provided in their art classes. Students in rural communities do not have public transportation to access museums and

art galleries typically found in more urban communities. Participants identified wanting access to more opportunities for their students both in school and out of school to access art programming. They described wanting support providing access to visiting artists and field trips to visit art galleries and studios where students could experience art styles and influences beyond the classroom and what they could provide. Programs like Arts in Ed support such programming, however, planning and implementing such initiatives is difficult for the singleton educator to manage on their own. Singletons often do not have access to curriculum coordinators or program managers who help to organize events such as visiting artists and field trips and their busy schedules leave little time and energy for such planning. In addition, some programming initiatives might not be cost effective for a small district to manage on their own. Recommendations for creating art opportunities for students include sharing programming across districts, such as visiting artists or artist presentations and field trips. Such initiative would accomplish two objectives, providing opportunities for students to engage in art programming and to engage in art programming with other art(s) minded students across communities.

Local Art Teacher Network Across Districts

Students and teachers can benefit from sharing resources and programming across districts leading to another want identified by participants, forming a local art teacher network across districts. Small districts should collaborate on professional development initiatives that bring singleton teachers together in content learning, program development, and planning shared opportunities for their students and communities. Regional communities of singletons can network together to access resources, share content knowledge, and provide support to one another across districts creating a wider community of singleton educators. Participants described accessing arts teacher networks online. Regional arts networks for singletons can meet

both in person and electronically. By creating a local network of singletons, teachers can plan

initiatives that meet their shared needs. They can pool local resources and information and share

the burden of planning and developing programs such as the Individual Arts Assessment

Pathway (IAAP). Additionally, local small school networks can share initiatives to provide

programming for their students, like art workshops and shows. One example is a shared exhibit

of senior artists' work across districts, bringing students and families together to celebrate the

talent and skills of their graduating students. Another example is sharing the expense of busing

students to local universities, galleries, or museums for arts programming for children.

Online Resources for Local Art Opportunities and Lesson Exemplars,
Access to Content Specialists for Help with Processes and Technical Questions,
and Resource Lending Library

Participants also requested online resources for local art opportunities and lesson

exemplars, access to content specialists and technicians, and a resource lending library. All of

these services could be provided by local agencies such as BOCES and local councils for the

arts. Such agencies need to be aware of what arts teachers need to support their programs.

Communicating this information to these agencies can be a productive first step in providing

supportive services for singletons. Programs such the BOCES. Arts Leadership Network could

be instrumental in creating an online network to provide information such as lesson exemplars,

programs for arts advocacy, and access to professional development offerings. Other

organizations such as the New York State Arts Teacher Association (NYSATA) and National

Art Education Association (NAEA) also offer access to information and services that singleton

art teachers might find useful. Access to information is only one component in the challenges

singletons face when it comes to resources. Time is another factor that stands in the way of

accessing resources. Singletons, although they are resourceful and motivated, cannot know what

they don't know, and their time is limited by the many other demands of their singleton-ness. Participants described missing having a curriculum coordinator or arts minded administrator who would alert them to opportunities that otherwise they might not have known about. Organizations such as BOCES Art Leadership Network could provide such services to singleton art teachers by creating an art opportunities and resources bulletin board managed by their staff to help keep teachers informed of offerings provided by their organization and other organizations. Local institutions such as colleges, universities, museums, and even BOCES could provide art-related resources for teachers through lending libraries. Some of these resources may already exist, what singletons need is someone to help them access these resources and information. Such supports can bridge the gap between what the self-reliant singleton can do for themself and what supports he/she needs to know what they don't know.

Positionality and Limitations

The interpretive/constructivist researcher must recognize the impact of his or her own background and experience as part of the interpretive process. Individuals create interpretations with the help of others and through this interaction they (co)construct meaning (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). This dissertation study has presented the storied accounts of seven rural singleton art teachers' experience in small districts across the Central New York region. These educators identified characteristics of the singleton phenomenon and skills they possess or developed from their experience teaching as singletons. My experience as a singleton art teacher in a rural school district mirrors the stories participants shared. It is appropriate as a researcher to identify my positionality as a singleton art teacher conducting this research. To ensure the validity of participants' accounts of their experience, I chose a three-interview protocol to collect rich contextual information regarding their experiences as singleton educators. After each interview,

participants were provided the interview transcripts to review and make corrections or provide clarification as necessary. Following the three interviews, participants were provided the narrative account of their experiences to review, once again providing the opportunity for them to adjust their story as necessary. Additionally, participants were invited to join in a virtual panel discussion to discuss the findings from the interviews. Participants engaged in discussion about the identified characteristics of the singleton phenomenon, skills associated with their singleton-ness, themes that emerged in their stories, and wants they requested to be considered to support their needs and to plan future professional development initiatives. Through this process of shared meaning making (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007) participants were allowed to "come to an agreement about the nature and warrant of a description of a phenomenon or its relationship to others" (Richardson, 2003, p. 3). For transparency and to connect the study's findings to the context of each participant's experience, the narrative account of each participant's story is included as an appendix to this study (Appendix C). Quotes provided to illustrate the findings in chapter four include references to the page number they can be found in the participant's story. This allows the reader to seek context as necessary.

Three of the participants in this study knew me professionally and personally before I interviewed them, the others did not. All participants were remarkably honest and willing to share their stories as singleton rural art teachers. They were eager to share information that would help other art teachers navigate the singleton teaching environment. Because I am also a singleton art teacher, I believe they felt understood, valued, and recognized. They knew I was interested in their stories, and I had an appreciation for their discipline and the context of their experience. This is important since they all described times that they did not feel valued or understood by colleagues and administrators throughout their careers. In this regard, my position

as both singleton art teacher and researcher were an asset. Although one can never completely

"bracket out" (Creswell, 2016) one's own personal experience, it is important that the

phenomenological researcher "set aside their experiences" (Creswell, 2016) to focus on the

participant's experience of a phenomenon. My role in this study as researcher was to record

participants' storied accounts of singleton-ness and provide them the opportunity to co-construct

meaning (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007) from these experiences, arriving at the "essence" (Creswell,

2016), common experience, of the phenomenon of singleton-ness. I believe I accomplished this

objective allowing participants opportunities to adjust and clarify their stories as necessary to

ensure accuracy and review and discuss the findings to arrive at a shared meaning of the

characteristics of their singleton experience and the singleton phenomenon.

The number of districts that participated in this study is one limitation. This dissertation

study explored singletons in rural school districts in the Central New York OCM BOCES region.

Eight districts in the region met the pre-determined rural identification criteria. Each district had

a total Pre-K through twelve enrollments of less than 1000 students, identified as rural according

to U.S. Census data, had a total district population of less than 7500 people, and was a member

of the N.Y.S. Rural Schools Association. I would have preferred to have more districts

represented in this study, however only five of the eight districts contacted allowed me to invite

their teachers to participate. Of those five districts, seven teachers from four of the districts

agreed to participate in the study. Although seven participants fall into the range of six to twelve

participants Beitlin (2012) and Kim (2016) recommend for interviews if there is thematic

redundancy, I would have preferred to have all the districts included in the data collection.

However, patterns of redundancy did emerge in the participant stories supporting a claim of

quality over quantity with at least three rounds of life-story interviews per participant (Kvale,

1996). Additionally, this report limited the discussion of findings to those specifically significant to the research problem and questions. Other findings such as those relating specifically to art content, or small or rural school phenomenon were not discussed at length and could be explored further. Another limitation or choice made to organize information was to include the narrative stories of each participant as an appendix to the findings rather than include each story in chapter four in its entirety. Including the full narratives in the appendices was a compromise to respect both the readers' time and participants' contextual accounts of their experiences as singletons. Readers can reference the quotes supporting findings in chapter four by accessing them in context in the participant's stories found in the appendices.

Finally, the group panel discussion was initially intended to be in person but was held virtually due to participants' limited availability and time. Of the seven participants, only four participated in person in the virtual discussion with two contributing information via a shared document of the findings. Although the participants who attended discussed the findings and presented recommendations for adjustments to the findings and arrived at "shared meanings", the discussion was not as candid as I believe it would have been if it had been an in-person experience. Participants did not know one another, and this format did not allow for the kind of meet and greet atmosphere an in-person gathering would have allowed. Although participants did engage in discussion, the kind of community building and sharing I had envisioned for this portion of the study did not occur. This experience highlighted the limitations of virtual, online, networks and communities. Relationship building takes time and often works best in person, at least initially, and in spaces where participants feel comfortable with sharing and being vulnerable. Taking time to meet one another and have side conversations and small talk would have set up a better environment for this portion of the study, allowing participants time to

become familiar with one another informally before engaging in discussion of their experiences as singletons.

Conclusions and Recommendations

This study explored the lived experiences of seven singleton art educators across four rural districts in Central New York. The purpose of this study was to explore the phenomenon of the rural singleton art teacher's experience and elicit characteristics of the singleton-teaching phenomenon. These characteristics will inform planning initiatives to provide professional development programs that support singleton art(s) educators' unique needs. The following research questions guided this exploration: What are the characteristics of the phenomenon of the rural singleton art educator's experience? How do rural singleton art teachers describe their experiences as lone content specialists in their buildings or districts? What meaning do rural singleton art teachers make from their singleton teaching experiences? What shared meaning does a group of rural singleton art teachers make from their collective experience as lone content specialist in their school or district? How can this shared meaning inform initiatives to provide professional development for singleton arts educators?

A phenomenological research design (Creswell, 2016) was chosen for this study valuing the context of participants' experience of the phenomenon of singleton-ness. A three-interview (Shuman, 1986; Seidman, 2006), inductive process of gathering stories of participant perspectives (Erickson, 1986) allowed me to elicit rich, descriptive, contextual data (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Creswell, 2014; Creswell & Guetterman, 2019) to document their storied accounts of singleton-ness. Additionally, enlisting a psychological constructivist (Patton, 2015; Piaget, 1970) approach to shared meaning making (Phillips, 2000) facilitated the co-construction of meaning participants made of their individual experiences as singletons and the shared meaning

of this phenomenon as experienced across contexts. Together participants identified common characteristics and skills associated with the phenomenon of singleton-ness. This shared meaning becomes formal knowledge and informs an understanding of the singleton experience across contexts (Phillips, 2020). Bogdan and Bilken (2007) describe this as "constructing a picture that takes shape as you collect and examine the parts" (p. 6). Including multiple accounts in a study is a strategy for enhancing the generalizability and validity of its findings (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Including the stories of each participant's rural singleton experience adds context and enhances the generalizability and validity of the findings of this study. It allows the reader the opportunity to explore the findings in the context of each participant's experience and analyze findings from research studies of singleton experiences across disciplines. Recommendations for future study include exploring singleton-ness across contexts (rural, sub-urban, urban, public and private school) and across disciplines.

Additionally, rich detailed information about the (rural) context of a study, including descriptions of the people, setting, and characteristics provide more clarity of the generalizability of a study's findings (Coladarci, 2007). The following criteria were used in defining the rural status of school districts canvased for this study: districts located in communities defined as rural (Rural 42-Distant and Rural 41-Fringe Census Classification Codes) by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), districts with total student enrollment of less than 1000 students pre-kindergarten thru twelfth grade, districts with a total population of residents of less than 7500 people, and districts with Rural Schools Association membership or affiliation. In addition, rich contextual, narrative descriptions of each of the rural school communities (Coladarci, 2007), guided by Brown and Schafft's (2011) four dimensions for describing rural places, adds clarity and validity to the operationalization of the term rural as the context of this study.

This study concluded that characteristics of the phenomenon of singleton-ness as identified by rural art singleton educators are consistent with existing literature regarding singleton-ness. In addition to these characteristics, skills and dispositions were identified that go along with the singleton experience. These skills help the singleton navigate the demands of their teaching environment. Skills such as resourcefulness and adaptability help the singleton navigate being the only one. Other significant findings were how singletons embrace the responsibility that comes with the autonomy they experience as singleton educators. Participants preferred autonomy to be a single characteristic rather than two characteristics listing pros and cons of autonomy. They identified that autonomy for them was like two sides of the same coin, neither good nor bad. Autonomy, and the freedom to adjust to one's singleton environment allows singletons the freedom to make professional choices that are responsive to their teaching environment and student learning needs.

Additionally, this study identified the characteristics of the self-reliant singleton. Lorte (1975) described self-reliance as a mindset adopted by new teachers who are not adequately supported by a mentor early in their careers, similarly self-reliance is identified by singletons as a skill they developed out of necessity since they are "the only one". The self-reliant singleton is organized, resourceful, and enthusiastic. They can adapt to their environment and job demands and use their creative problem-solving skills to navigate challenges. They are self-advocates, self-starters, and self-reflective. They use their communication and people skills to promote their programs and seek out others. They embrace the "joy and hard work" of being a singleton.

The self-reliant singleton experiences frustration and isolation when they discover they don't know what they don't know. In these moments they realize the limitations of their singleton-ness and need support. Programs designed to facilitate the needs of singletons must

recognize that veteran singletons have adapted to their environments and new singletons need knowledgeable mentors who share their content specialty and singleton experience. Additionally, such programs must recognize the demands of the singletons' schedule and target their initiatives to be responsive to their unique needs. The self-reliant singleton must balance the time of being away from their classroom with the benefits of the PD being offered. Programming designed to attract the self-reliant singleton educator must consider what they need that they cannot provide for themselves. Needs such as a network of content peers and resources that will augment their programs, opportunities for their students, hands-on content training that can lead to enriched learning in their classrooms, and access to information and resources they cannot find on their own. Additionally, singletons need common time to collaborate with their district content peers for team building and PLCs that have clear, shared objectives.

Recommendations for PD programming have been described earlier in this chapter, however, ultimately such initiatives need to include the input of the participants in planning and decision making (Hargreaves & Dawe, 1990; Ingersoll & Alsalam, 1997; Pearson & Moomaw, 2005; Tye & Tye 1984). Recommendations for future research should include action research studies that enlists singleton educators in a process of planning and implementing professional development initiatives that create a community of singletons across districts within a region that share common content and programming goals. A program such as this could then become an example of how to facilitate singleton professional learning networks among rural schools that support the needs of singleton educators teaching any specialized content subject. For example, teams of physics teachers or technology teachers, any singleton content subject where lone teachers need access to content peers. Singletons do not need to be isolated or alone in their content specialty. District administrators and education reformers need to be mindful of the

unique needs of all educators if they wish to be mindful of the needs of all students. Current

scholarship promotes teacher collaboration in the form of professional development communities

to improve teacher quality and student outcomes (Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2005; Day,

Stobart, Sammons, Kington, & Gu, 2007; Garet, Porter, Desimone, Birman & Yoon, 2001;

Leana, 2011; Loucks-Horsley et al., 2010; Loughran et al., 2012; Malhoit 2005; Morrissey,

2000; Nias, Southworth, & Yeomans, 1989; Rosenholtz, 1989; Schleifer, Rinehart, & Yanisch,

2017; Shulman, 1986; Talbert & McLaughlin, 1994; and Vescio, Ross, & Adams, 2008). With

these new understandings of the characteristics of the phenomenon of singleton-ness and the

skills singleton art educators identified as characteristic of the singleton experience, more

informed initiatives for professional development to meet the needs of these singletons can be

initiated.

Why Singletons Matter

Singleton content specialists are common in small and/or rural districts (Battersby &

Verdi, 2015; Berwager, 2013; Cohen-Evron, 2002; Ferriter et al. 2013; Gates, 2010; Hanes &

Schiller, 1994; Hansen, 2015; Richmond & Manokore, 2011; Brook 2011; Inwood, 2001). The

National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) reported that 46.5 percent of all United States

school districts in 2019-20 had an enrollment of less than 1000 students and 70.7 percent of U.S.

districts enrolled less than 2500 students (NCES, Table 203.72). In New York State specifically,

90 percent of districts reported enrollments of less than 1000 students in 2019-20 (NCES, Table

216.43). These statistics along with New York State (NYS.) Association of School Business

Officials, Rural School Report (2017) which documents a long-term decline in rural school

enrollment and increase in rural student poverty, also highlights the need for programming

designed to help facilitate the needs of singleton educators across disciplines. Decreases in

student enrollment force rural districts to reduce faculty to meet district financial demands. This trend indicates the likelihood of an increase in singleton content specialist serving in these districts and supports the need for programming to help connect singletons across districts to one another in meaningful collaboration and content specific professional development.

Brig Leane and Jon Yost (2022), in their book entitled *Singletons in a PLC at Work: Navigating On-ramps to Meaningful Collaboration*, identify that "All schools have singletons, and some schools have many singletons or are made up solely of singletons" (p. 3). The authors describe the challenges leaders face when seeking to design Professional Development Communities (PLC) that support "meaningful collaboration" for singleton educators. Leane and Yost (2022), expanding upon a DuFour et al. (2016) definition, defines meaningful collaboration as "a significant, valuable, worthwhile, and systematic process in which educators work together, interdependently, to analyze and impact their professional practices to improve individual and collective results" (p. 10). The challenge becomes how to support singletons in identifying and defining their needs to inform the facilitation of networks of meaningful collaboration within and across communities.

This dissertation study explored the phenomenon of singleton-ness as experienced by singleton art educators in rural school districts to identify characteristics of their singleton experience and address this challenge. The findings of this study identified characteristics of singleton-ness as well as skills and dispositions that participants identified as crucial to their ability to navigate the challenges of being a lone content specialist in their school. Singleton-ness is not limited to art educators. Many of the characteristics identified by participants were consistent with findings from studies of singletons in different content specialties such as secondary science (Hagin, 2020), family and consumer sciences (Dodor, Sira, & Hausafus,

2010), and music (Sindberg & Lipscomb, 2005, Sindberg, 2011, 2014) and studies of singleton teacher isolation in general (Battersby & Verdi, 2015, Cutts et al. 2017) adding to the body of knowledge and understanding of singleton-ness across contexts and disciplines.

Additionally, participants' stories of experience teaching in a singleton environment revealed skills that supported their abilities to navigate the challenges of being a lone content specialist. These skills for success can inform the practices of other singleton educators and help administrators identify what skills and dispositions they need to foster and support in their faculty. The identification of themes such as the self-reliant singleton and you don't know what you don't know add to the body of knowledge regarding the mind-set of the singleton and how they balance autonomy and responsibility as a lone content educator. Knowledge of the self-reliant mindset that participants described as part of their experience is important to an understanding of singletons' needs and how administrators can support these needs.

Research reports that rural education still battles challenges recruiting and retaining rural school teachers (Barley & Brigham, 2008; Clifford, 2013; Darling-Hammond, & Carver-Thomas, 2016; Ellis, 2008; Fishman, 2015; Gagnon & Mattingly, 2012; Johnson, & Hartman, 2017; Kollie, 2007; LaGarry & Richard, 2018; Lamkin, 2006; Lavalley, 2018; McHenry-Sorber & Campbell, 2019; Roberts & Green, 2013; Showalter, Klein, Jimerson, 2003; Steed, Pomerleau, Muscott, & Rohde, 2013; Strange, 2011; Sue, 2013; Sutcher, Timar & Carter, 2017) and singleton-ness adds to this challenge. In a time when current scholarship promotes teacher collaboration in the form of professional development communities to improve teacher quality and student outcomes (Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2005; Day, Stobart, Sammons, Kington, & Gu, 2007; Garet, Porter, Desimone, Birman & Yoon, 2001; Leana, 2011; Loucks-Horsley et al., 2010; Loughran et al., 2012; Malhoit 2005; Morrissey, 2000; Nias, Southworth, & Yeomans,

1989; Rosenholtz, 1989; Schleifer, Rinehart, & Yanisch, 2017; Shulman, 1986; Talbert & McLaughlin, 1994; and Vescio, Ross, & Adams, 2008) an understanding of the characteristics of singleton-ness and the needs of singleton educators across contexts and content specialties is vital to the ability to initiate PLC's that meet these educators' needs.

Next Steps

The information gathered from this study will be used to inform an initiative to bring singleton art educators together in a community of art educators across local districts. The findings have confirmed the need for professional development initiatives that are planned with the wants and needs of the singleton educator in mind. Additionally, this study has illuminated the characteristics of the singleton experience that get in the way of singletons participating in out of district professional development offerings. Characteristics such as busy schedules due to job demands and (in)frequency of contact time with students, feeling unable to leave the classroom due to sub availability and loss of student learning, and the self-reliant singleton's need to justify the value of what is being offered compared to what they can figure out on their own. It also identified that singletons desire opportunities for extended content learning for themselves and for their students. They recognize that, despite having skills that promote self-reliance, they need access to what they don't know and cannot easily find on their own. Creating a network of local art educators can help bridge the gap in information gathering and access to content knowledgeable peers.

Singletons in this study identified specific wants to be considered when planning future professional development initiatives that serve their needs. These wants were consistent across contexts and the panel discussion confirmed that these requests are generalizable to a broader understanding of singletons' needs. Wants such as having a local art teacher network across

districts where teachers can engage in hands-on content specific professional development, community building, and access support for curriculum development, on-line resources, and lesson exemplars. A local network of singleton art educators can create a community of educators who support one another, serve as mentors to art educators entering the field, and form alliances for arts advocacy and shared programming. Next steps towards the implementation of PD programming to serve the needs of singleton art educators in rural communities is to bring singletons together to form a local network, shared PLC, to establish goals for future shared PD initiatives across districts. A regional PLC for singleton art teachers could serve as a pilot study for future PD programming for singletons across disciplines. Singletons across disciplines share a need for access to content knowledgeable peers. A pilot program such as this could bring smalls school districts that have many singleton content specialists together in providing for the needs of their singleton educators. Comprehensive, documented, planning of such initiatives can advance our understanding of singleton-ness and how to meet the needs of singleton educators across districts and disciplines.

Appendix A
Pre-interview Questionnaire Data

Questionnaire Questions	Nora *South*	Smith *South*	Marie *Cowtown*	Clover *Cowtown*	Michael *Eagleton*	Mrs. Art *Appleton*	Nina *Appleton*
1. How many years have you been teaching art?	15	10	32	25	14	35	10
2. How long have you been teaching art in your current district?	13 Years	2 Years	32 Years 2 years .5 split position	24 Years	11 Years 8 Full-time	28 Years	2 Years
3. Please list your current grade level(s) or course teaching responsibilities.	9-12 Grade Studio Art Adv. Studio Painting and Drawing Portfolio Prep.	7th and 8th Grade Art 9-12 Grade H.S. Ceramics H.S. Sculpture	Pre-K – 6th Grade Elementary Art	7th – 12th Grade 7th -8th Grade Art 9th Grade Studio & Creative Crafts H.S. Clay I, II, III	Pre-K – 6th Grade Elementary Art	9th – 12th Grade Studio Art I, II, III, IV, V	Pre-K – 8th Grade General Art
4. Please list any previous grade level(s) or course teaching responsibilities you have had in your current district.	7th and 8th Grade AP Computer Graphics	N/A	Enrichment	K- 6 Elementary School	N/A	7th & 8th Grade Art AP Principals of Drawing	N/A
5. If applicable, please list the location (district/school) and description (course or grade levels) of your previous teaching positions outside of your current district.	6th – 8th Grade Art Suburban District *School name not included here.	9-12 Grade H.S. Ceramics I, II, & III Sculpture I & II 3D Art AP Urban – Large – H.S. *	Elementary Rural *	K-6 Elementary Rural *	Elementary Urban *	Middle School Rural * 7th & 8th Grade Introduction to Technology Studio in Art 7th Grade Art Tech. Drawing I, II, III, IV	Pre-K – 8 Art Urban District Middle School Special Education *

#	Question							
6.	Do you currently or have you previously lived in this school district? If yes, when and how long have you lived in this school district?	No	Yes – previously. Not currently Alumni	No	Yes, Currently 4 years	No	No	No
7.	How would you describe your childhood community? Rural, Town, Sub-urban, Urban	Suburban	Rural	Rural	Rural/Suburban	Varied due to frequent moves.	Rural	Urban
8.	Please describe the size of your childhood school district. Totaling less than 1000 students, between 1000 – 2500 students, 2500 – 4000 students, or totaling more than 4000 students.	Small/Private Totaling less than 1000 students	Less than 1000 students	Less than 1000 students	More than 4000	Varied Graduated from a district with less than 1000 students.	Between 1000-2500 students	Private Small School Under 1000 students.
9.	How long (time and/or distance) is your current commute from home to school?	25 minutes	20 minutes	25 minutes	1 minutes	Current 8 minutes	20 minutes	17 minutes
10.	Do you participate in any professional development communities, courses, workshops, etc., including but not limited to the arts, through your district? If yes, please list them.	Yes 5+ * Not listed here.	Yes 5+ *	Yes 1 *	Yes 2 *	Yes 5+ *	Yes 5+ *	Yes 3+

11. Do you participate in any arts activities, communities, courses, workshops, etc., not required by your district, for your own enjoyment and/or professional development? If yes, please list them.	Yes Practicing Artist * Not listed here	Yes Home Studio *	No or Infrequently No time	Yes Craft/art workshops when I can. *	Yes Home Studio *	Yes Home Studio *	Yes Home Studio *	Yes Home Studio Practicing Artist *
12. Are you currently assigned to a teaching team or professional learning community (PLC, Grade Level Team, Vertical Team, Content Team, etc.) in your district? If yes, please describe the make-up and purpose of this group including how often you meet.	Chair of Fine Arts Department Monthly Meetings	Department	Art Content Team Curriculum Work	Art Content Team Special Areas Department Chair	Department "Special Forces Team" Mentor	PLC Pre-K – 12 Art, Music and Technology Group Focus had been literacy, curriculum, and SEL Met weekly afterschool.	PLC Art and Music Meets twice a month. Focus mixed
13. Do you have the opportunity for regular meetings with other arts educators in your district? If yes, how often do you meet, what is your purpose, and where do you meet?	Yes Monthly Department Meeting District Staff Days Irregularly	Yes Monthly Department Meetings	Recently, Yes Every other week after school. Previously, No District Professional Development Days	Recently, Yes Every other week after school. District Professional Development Days	Not regularly.	Yes Monthly Focus is primarily curriculum.	Yes PLC Twice monthly District Professional Development Days
14. Are you able to interact with other educators in your school on a daily basis? If yes,	Yes Hallways and Email Frequently	No Isolated in separate building	Yes Lunch Group Special Area Teachers	"Not often. teach next door to "partner" art teacher." "Some after contract time."	Yes - sometimes Grade level meetings.	"Varies by the day. Some days there is no time to interact with	Yes Weekly "Specials meeting"

describe where and when.						other educators." "Most interactions are unplanned."	Collaboration work
15. Does your district's community offer opportunities for students to participate in arts learning outside of school? If yes, please describe these opportunities.	None I can think of.	Field trips are supported by the district.	Unsure – Library sometimes offers classes.	Some Arts Counsil Artist Workshops	Unaware of any not connected to the school.	"Unaware of any."	Unsure "Depends on the year."
16. Which best describes your district's community support for visual arts learning? Very supportive, somewhat supportive, neither supportive nor unsupportive, unsupportive	Currently, a mix between very and somewhat supportive	Somewhat supportive. "Parents are excited for the arts and some parents donate supplies."	Very Supportive	Very Supportive "Seek out pieces for exhibit." Arts Counsil available.	Very Supportive.	Somewhat Supportive	Very Supportive
17. How do you describe your colleagues' value for visual arts learning? Very supportive, somewhat supportive, neither supportive nor unsupportive, unsupportive	Depends on the colleague. "I do a lot of work to constantly promote what the kids do, which has led to some colleagues being very supportive. Others just don't get it."	"They love the arts, but I do not feel as an equal to core content teachers."	Very Supportive	Very Supportive	Somewhat Supportive	Somewhat Supportive	Neutral Mostly

18. How do you describe your administration's support for visual arts learning? Very supportive, somewhat supportive, neither supportive nor unsupportive, unsupportive	Currently – Very to somewhat supportive. Improvement from past years.	Somewhat supported. "The principal fought last year to have my position pushed from part-time to full-time."	Very Supportive Similar to other disciplines.	Supportive Limited faculty. Scheduling constraints.	Somewhat Supportive This is inconsistent due to administrative changes.	Very Supportive	Currently Very Supportive
19. Does your classroom budget for materials meet your needs for instruction? If not, please explain.	Usually, yes.	"I am still learning this. I was granted more money this year to build a program, but I am not sure what will be granted next year to keep it going."	Yes	Yes	"It has been a roller coaster throughout the years."	"I structured the instruction to fit the budget."	Yes "The budget covers the needs for general art."
20. Does your classroom layout meet your needs for instruction? If not, please explain.	Yes, due to recent renovations.	No, not currently. Former computer lab made into a 3D studio classroom.	Somewhat Not specifically designed for art instruction. One sink, limited storage, etc.	Yes, recently renovated. Previously – no.	Currently pretty good. Odd layout. Designed to be a family and consumer science room with kitchen spaces.	Recently renovated. "The lighting is not flexible making it difficult to create different lighting conditions in the room."	Yes "I am very lucky here." Some recent renovations made to the room.

Appendix B

Three Interview Protocol

<u>**Three Interview Protocol**</u>

<u>**First Interview: Establish Context**</u> **– Teacher account of teaching environment (routines, procedures, classroom and school set-up, etc.)**

Prior to the first interview, review the participant's questionnaire.

Personal and Professional Context as Art Educator

Big Idea 1: How did your life's journey lead you to become an art educator in this community? (Personal/Professional History)

1. Please tell me a bit more about your work history and how your life's journey led you to teach art here in *name of district.*
    a. How did your experiences with art growing up influence your interest in art and now teaching art?
    b. What supports, if any, did you have growing up that fostered your interest in art and teaching?
2. How does this community compare to the community where you grew up?
    a. If applicable, how does this community compare to communities in other districts where you have taught?
3. Describe your experience in your teacher preparation program and how did it prepare you for teaching art here at *name of district*?
    a. Did any of your courses offer instruction specific to teaching in small and/or rural districts? If so, please explain.
4. Is there anything else that led to your becoming an art teacher you would like to share?

Big Idea 2: What are the characteristics of your school teaching environment? (Schedule, Classes, Classroom, Materials, Location)

1. Describe for me your daily routine. (Schedule)
    a. What grade levels/courses do you teach?
    b. How long are your class periods?
    c. How often do you meet with students?
    d. If teaching from a cart, what is your procedure for teaching art in student's classrooms?
2. Please describe for me a typical lesson in your classroom. How do you and the students interact with this learning space? (Learning Space/Materials)
    a. How do you use your classroom space for materials, instruction, etc.?
    b. How well does this space function for the courses and students you teach?
    c. How well do the materials and equipment you have meet your needs for instruction and student learning?

3. Where is your classroom located in relationship to other classrooms and common areas for students and teachers? (Location)
   a. Do you have the opportunity during the day to interact with other teachers?
      i. If yes, when and where, and for what purpose?
      ii. If not, what is that like for you?
   b. Are students able to stop in and visit your classroom throughout the day or after school?
      i. If not, please explain.
      ii. If yes, please describe these encounters.

Big Idea 3: What supports and procedures are in place for your art instruction and students' learning? (Instruction, Curriculum, District, and Community)

1. Please describe the assessment tools and grading procedures for the art courses or grade levels you teach. (Support for Instruction - Curricular)
   a. Who or what resources are available to you to determine and carry out your curricular goals?
   b. Do you work with other arts educators or teachers/administrators in your district on art curriculum goals and objectives?
      i. If yes, who, when?
   c. Do you participate in professional development or curriculum work outside of your content area? If yes, please explain.
   d. What other resources do you draw upon for curriculum (lessons) and assessment tools?
   e. Do you create your own art outside of school? If, yes, please explain.
2. How would you describe this district's teacher and administrative involvement in, or value for arts learning? (School Community)
3. How would describe this community's involvement in or value for arts learning? (Living Community)
4. What more can you tell me about this district and its community values and culture?

Closing: Is there anything more you would like to share today about your journey to becoming an art teacher and the general context of your teaching environment?

Prior to interview two, participants will have the opportunity to read through the transcript from interview 1 and make amendments or add clarification as they see fit. (Member Check)

Questions for interview two will follow up on the data collected in interview 1.

An interpretive psychological constructivist paradigm provides a framework to inductively explore the singleton phenomenon and through a process of shared interpretation, constructing meaning from participants' experiences. A qualitative phenomenological approach to data collection facilitates a better understanding of participant's perceptions of the phenomenon of their singleton experience.

<u>Second Interview: Characteristics of Singleton Experience</u> – Teacher's account of teaching as a singleton educator (experiences, challenges, advantages, adaptations, etc.)

Personal and Professional Context of being a Singleton Art Educator

Big Idea: What is your singleton teaching experience?

1. Please describe what it is like to be a singleton art educator in *name of district/school here.*
    a. What is it like to be the only art teacher – *content specialty* – in your district?
    b. How would you describe the circumstances of your singleton teaching experience?
2. How is being a singleton art educator challenging?
    a. What challenges have you faced as a singleton art educator?
    b. What makes being a singleton challenging?
3. What skills help you to be successful as a singleton art educator?
    a. What and where do you obtain support for your teaching both professionally and personally?
    b. What advantages have you experienced as a singleton art educator?
4. What supports help you better navigate your singleton teaching experience?
    a. Where do you draw your inspiration and support from as a singleton art educator?
    b. What adaptations have you created for yourself?
    c. What supports are in place for you from your colleagues, district, and community?
5. Do you interact with colleagues who are also singletons? If yes, how do these relationships add to your understanding of your singleton experience?

Closing: Is there anything else you would like to share about your singleton experience?

Prior to interview three, participants will have the opportunity to read through the transcript from interview 2 and make amendments or add clarification as they see fit. (Member Check)

Questions for interview three will follow up on the data collected in interview 1&2.

<u>Interview 3 – Meaning Making</u> - Participants accounts of meaning of his/her singleton experience.

Big Idea: What does it mean to be a singleton art teacher?

1. After reflecting upon your singleton art teaching experience, how would you describe what it means to be a singleton teacher?
    a. How is the singleton experience unique?
    b. What characteristics do you associate with your singleton experience?

      c. What characteristics are missing from your singleton experience?
2. How does being a singleton art educator in your district affect your experience as an educator professionally?
3. How does being a singleton art educator in your district affect your experience as an educator socially?
4. How does district, colleague, community level of support for the arts impact the meaning of your singleton art teaching experience?
5. How does being a singleton art educator in your district affect your professional development needs?
      a. Are your needs the same or different from other educators?
6. What characteristics of your singleton art teaching experience should be considered when designing professional development programming?
      a. What are your personal and professional development needs as a singleton art educator?

Closing: Please share any additional information you would like included in this interview regarding the meaning making of your singleton teaching experience or characteristics of your experience as a singleton.

Appendix C

Participant Stories

Nora's Story ~ South Jr/Sr High School

Teacher Background Demographics

Nora (pseudonym) is a visual arts teacher at South Jr/Sr High School (pseudonym) which serves 328 students in grades seven through twelve (data.nysed.gov). South Jr/Sr High School (SHS) is in a rural farming community located thirteen miles southwest of an urban center with a population of approximately 150,000 people (Census.gov). Nora has been teaching at this school for thirteen years. She has taught art for grades seven through twelve and currently teaches two-dimensional arts in grades nine through twelve. There are two other art teachers in the district. One teaches elementary art grades Pre-K through sixth grade and the other teaches art in grades seven and eight, and sculpture and ceramics for grades nine through twelve. Both these teachers have classrooms in other buildings in the district. Nora has had experience teaching art at all grade levels, having served as a substitute teacher and long-term sub at other area districts prior to getting her full-time position at SHS. This gave her experience working in districts that had different demographic profiles, such as a larger sub-urban school and a smaller rural elementary school.

Nora grew up in a sub-urban community in western New York. She describes her community as a "very typical sub-urban community." She attended a small private elementary school where she was one of ten students in her eighth grade graduating class. She continued at a small private Jr/Sr high school where she graduated one of sixty-five students. She noted that the public high school in her community was much larger which currently has approximately 1,150 students. Nora, the oldest child in her family, described entertaining herself, siblings, and cousins with art. She stated, "I would frequently draw to entertain myself when I was a kid, like, I would find a Disney movie on a VHS tape and pause it when it got to a certain part on the screen and sit there and try to draw what was on the screen to entertain myself. Or if we were having a family gathering, I would take cartoon animal requests from my younger cousins to entertain them and draw them stuff to color. And it was always my favorite thing in elementary school when I was younger."

Nora's parents and family were very supportive of her art making. She described both her mom and dad as enjoying making art. She also described how her grandfather as a "self-taught artist." When she decided to go to college for art her parents were supportive, "…they would always encourage me as well. And my dad would always say, 'I can't draw, but I'll get you whatever art supplies, whatever books you want.' So, my parents were always very encouraging when they knew I wanted to apply to art for college when I was in high school, never once discouraged me from it." Additionally, Nora's art interests were supported by her elementary and

high school teachers. In elementary school, since they did not have a formal art teacher, Nora would help her teacher come up with fun ideas for art instruction for her class.

Nora spent summers living in a rural island community in the northeast where she taught art at a youth camp. She described, "We were on the rural side of the island, where it was small farm communities. Everyone knew everyone. So, I had that small town experience in the summers. So, it was kind of like, a little bit of everything." She continued, "I knew, when I was interviewing here, I liked the idea of working at a smaller school. I had subbed in enough larger schools, where I'm like, some of these kids, no one knows them, knows who they are, they just get lost in the crowd. I just liked the vibe of a small town better, but I think that came from twelve summers of working in a small-town environment where I was teaching art."

Unfortunately, Nora's guidance counselor was not as supportive of her art ambitions. She stated, "My guidance counselor was not, she was clueless and tried to discourage me from applying for art." She continued, "She was like, I just don't think it's a good career move for you. And she just wasn't… She didn't listen."

Nora did not let her guidance counselor discourage her ambition for art. Ultimately, Nora studied computer graphics, at Syracuse University. After completing her undergraduate degree, she took four years off from school and worked as a freelance artist, taught youth art classes, and worked retail. She then enrolled in a one-year intensive Master's in Art Education program at RIT that was geared towards practicing artists wishing to go into art education. The program was three trimesters and included one hundred hours of observation, all your education coursework, and twelve weeks of student teaching. She noted that this program "only accept people who were fine arts undergrads, because they wanted people who were practicing artists and not artists in theory."

Nora describes her student teaching experiences as setting a high bar for her to aspire to in her own teaching. She explained,

> I was also lucky that I got placed with two very good teachers. The woman I did my elementary placement with, aside from my coworker who works at the elementary school, was probably one of the calmest most unflappable people I've ever met in my life. And I'm like, oh, you were meant to be an elementary teacher. And then the man I did my high school placement with, I'm like, you are whatever your teacher should be like, you are the goal to aspire to. So, it was nice, lucky, but they were also teachers in well off districts who lacked for nothing. So, they had all the resources, which also helped them to be successful. Also, I was working with classes that we don't have here, like AP level classes and things like that. So, it was a very different spectrum. But I was lucky in that I had good placements with teachers. I knew other people who very much struggled depending on where they were placed. Well, I think there's an advantage to that, too, in terms of being able to kind of have a view of what that high bar is. So that in your own practice, you have a standard, that you know, that you've kind of internalized, you know, for your own practice. The high school teacher, who I

said was amazing, he went through the same program RMIT that I went through. So, it was kind of nice to see that, to see like, oh, it could lead to this.

When asked why she went into teaching art, Nora commented, "… it's just, it was something that I could see myself doing for a full-time job. I got to help people and make a difference and things, but I also got to work creatively every day. And I knew, I did not want a job where I'm sitting behind a desk or working behind a shop counter or anything like that. I just thought it gave me the most opportunity to feel like I was making a difference in the world, but still be creatively engaged."

Teaching Environment

South Junior-Senior High School is in a small village nestled in a rural community in Central New York. According to census data this district is identified as Rural (41) Fringe. The district community population is 5,553 +/- 364 residents (Census.gov). The district serves 743 students across three school locations. A Pre-K through second grade elementary school, third through sixth grade middle school, and seventh through twelfth grade junior senior high school. The elementary school is in a suburban community on the border of a larger metropolitan area. The middle school and Jr/Sr high school are both located in a small village approximately seven miles from the elementary school location.

The middle and Jr/Sr high school buildings are both located on the same side of the road and are divided by a roadway and football field. The Jr/Sr high school building is located across the driveway from the outbuilding that houses the shop classroom and 3D art classroom where Nora's Jr/Sr high school colleague's classroom is located. Nora's classroom is located on the second floor of the high school's main building. She has been in this location her entire career at South Jr/Sr High School. Recently the classroom was renovated to accommodate more storage and a larger sink area. Nora was consulted regarding the renovations and had the opportunity to request features of the layout and storage that would best serve her, and her students, needs. She stated, "Until that (the renovation), everything was very much a cobbled together collection of free or found furniture and cast-offs from other classrooms. Organization and storage used to be a big issue."

When you enter the door to Nora's room there are windows on the opposite wall that span the length of the classroom which is essentially two classroom spaces combined together. The opposite wall is covered with ceiling to floor storage cabinets and counter spaces with cabinets above and below the counters. The cabinets include space for large paper storage and bins for art materials that are easily accessible for students. The cabinet fronts are flat allowing Nora to display visual resources, such as color wheels artist examples, and student work.

Under the windows there are additional areas for shelving and storage. Nora stores art books and other print resources in this area and the counter area supports drying racks. The classroom is divided into two work areas by an island that has two large sinks back-to-back accessible on both sides with a small counter area and cabinet storage underneath. Tables are

grouped in both areas allowing multiple students to sit at each table. On one end of the room there is another counter and open shelf storage area that acts as a barrier for the end wall where Nora stores material she wishes to keep away from the main work area such as the printer, scanner, and computer station. She also uses this area to "hide" away materials she is using throughout the day with various classes to keep the main area from getting cluttered and keep students from accessing materials not meant for their use. She described, "And then in the back of the room. It's more storage stuff like my file cabinets or my flat file that has examples and the table in the back of the room with the paper cutter also the kids know there's newspaper under there if they need it for their table, or magazines, or cardboard and things like that." Nora's desk is placed in the window side corner at the other end of the classroom with her desk facing into the classroom.

Nora has developed a bin type system for students to store their materials. She commented that COVID forced her to develop a system to keep student materials separated and she has kept the system because she liked how it worked. Additionally, students each have their own sketch book and there is an open shelf area for their storage. In addition to the classroom storage, Nora has access to a closet storage space away from the classroom where she can store larger awkward materials such as scrap wood, display racks, and a firesafe storage cabinet for combustible items. There is also another space away from the classroom, down the hall, where the kiln is located. Nora elaborated, "I have some things that are awkward shapes… I do a lot of salvaged materials, bringing in interesting things for the kids to use. Like, I'm always bringing stuff and everyday people are like, what are you carrying in now? Yeah, so that's a good place to stash that random stuff. Is it a pretty storage? No, but it's nice to have a spot where you can have the not so pretty things."

When asked about how the space functioned for her needs Nora stated,

 I love the location of my classroom, the only time I don't love it is in the hotter months, because this room gets very hot up on the second floor. But in terms of being able to communicate with the kids, with teachers with administration, I've been very happy with being centrally located. I'm working on trying to bring our other art teacher over into this building. Because it would give so much better collaboration opportunities, not just for us, but for the students, we can almost have like a little art wing. It would bring her closer to the kiln. Because when we first did all the stuff for getting a kiln, we didn't have a ceramics teacher. It was going to be me doing clay stuff with the kids, which is part of why it's here. …And I'm like, let's bring her over here, please. Well, it would make complete sense.

Nora has classroom teachers on either side of her classroom and down the hall. She enjoys being neighbors with other content colleagues and actively interacts with them. She explained, "Teachers pop in all the time. The math teacher next door, the earth science teacher across the hall, the physics teacher, we all talk about stuff all the time. Some of the special ed

teachers will stop in, when possible. I'll keep the door open. Other times I close it, but people know."

There is a faculty lounge area on the first floor. Nora explained,

Yeah, the faculty room is downstairs. I use it as a refrigerator to put my lunch in and to heat my lunch up. And that's it. I don't eat lunch down there. I used to. I stopped eating lunch down there during COVID, and actually, even a little before COVID because sometimes I felt like it just turned into a room where people just sat down and ate their lunch and complained. And I'm like, I know that that's not what I want for my half hour. So, I will frequently be doing work while I'm eating my lunch. Anyway, I'm like, it's just the less work I bring home with me, the better.

Other common areas for students and faculty, such as the library, auditorium, cafeteria, and gym, are located on the first floor in another wing away from Nora's classroom. The high school office is located on the first floor in the hallway below her classroom near the main entrance.

Scheduling

Additionally, for many years SHS did not have a middle school art teacher so Nora was responsible for teaching grades seven through twelve. She described how over the years her teaching responsibilities and schedule have changed,

When I started here, I taught grades seven through twelve, six different art classes every day. Some of those classes had more than one section. That was a couple years. And then we brought in a part-time art teacher who was doing middle school and one section of studio art. And during that time, I was able to do a computer graphics class for college credit through Onondaga Community College since she was able to take some of the teaching load, which was great for the kids because they got college credit. And I was using what I studied at Syracuse University, so it was perfect. But then after two or three years, her position got cut. And then it went back to me and the elementary teacher covering everything because of the way class numbers had shifted. I was doing, like art for grades eight through twelve, which was five different classes. And our elementary teacher was in two buildings, and then also coming up here to teach seventh grade art, which we did for a few years. And then COVID hit, and everything exploded. It was chaos. And in October of that year with the hybrid teaching year. We had told them it wasn't going to work for her schedule. They (administration) didn't listen, they still started the year, six weeks and they realized, yeah, this isn't going to work. So, in middle of October all the middle school got shifted back onto me during hybrid. So, I was doing grades seven through twelve, six different classes. And that was when I think they realized, oh, we need to hire a part-time person back because this is not sustainable. I almost quit that year. Yeah, like it was, it was that bad. But we hired a part-time person. And then she was here a year. And then she left, because it's hard to retain someone in a part-time position. And then

our new teacher joined us after that still part-time. But we were really pushing to make her full-time because we wanted to retain her. And we also wanted to build a ceramics program, because we had finally talked them into getting us a kiln for the first time ever at the high school level. So last year, they finally did make her full-time.

Although the district has hired another high school art teacher, Nora's schedule is still very full. She explained her schedule,

This year, I am teaching studio art, advanced studio painting and drawing and portfolio prep. Studio art is mostly ninth grade, but it's always mixed, just depending on what kids are able to take it. Advanced studio is usually mostly tenth grade. But again, a little bit of a mix of the upper levels, painting and drawing is mostly eleventh grade. And portfolio prep is seniors only. It's not an AP portfolio class, we use it if a student is not going to college for art, they're assembling a portfolio that is a summary of their high school career. But if they are applying to college for art, then I'm the one who's helping them put together their portfolio and do their college applications, because our guidance department, they do a good job, but they know nothing about the portfolio process or anything that goes into that. And the portfolio kids come in concurrently with other classes. So, like, while I'm teaching studio art, I also have a portfolio kid in here, and I'm going between them because it's the only way it works in the schedule.

She continued,

…this year, first period, I have studio art with a portfolio student who comes in, I have my planning period, then I have advanced studio, then I have a study hall duty with seniors who come in here, then I have painting and drawing class with portfolio students who also come in, then I have studio art, then my lunch, then I have hall duty, or they will sometimes pull me from hall duty to cover another teacher's class or to cover the testing center or something like that. Then I have another studio class. And then it's activity period, which is either students come in for extra time, or that's when I have art club meet once a week, or that's also when they schedule us to have meetings. Duties can change every year. I've had lunch duty before, which is the worst. But so, the duties can change every year.

Nora described the difficulty of balancing class schedules, course offerings and contractually required allotment of preparation periods. She has fought hard to advocate for her program and help administrators understand the preparation required to teach an effective art course. Additionally, she has pushed back against scheduling students in "independent study" art courses during prep times. Her struggle is evident in the following passage.

So, here if we have four classes, you get one prep, if you're teaching more than four, like if you were teaching five different classes, they would have to give you a second prep. They usually avoid doing that here because they desperately need the duty coverage. I've argued for it before. It's part of the reason we don't have the computer graphics class anymore. Because when I started here, the way it had

been arranged with the previous teacher, the portfolio class where they came in concurrently, even though it was another class, they weren't counting towards the prep time. I had to argue it for years before they finally agreed to make it part of the prep time. But then they wouldn't let me teach the other class because then they would have lost duty coverage. And I'm like, isn't it better to have teaching classes? So, the portfolio class does count now and before they used to frame it as like an independent study. I'm like, no, no, no, it's, it's, it's a class, don't, don't call it an independent study because people get the wrong idea. Ya know, I was a thorn in their side about that for quite a few years. … I have had many meetings with our union reps over the years, I've sat down with our principal, with the superintendent. I've really talked to them about it a lot over the years, to the point where after a while… they're probably like, oh, God, here she comes again. But I stuck to it. And they finally were like, okay, it's a class.

Class sizes range from 10-15 students depending upon the section or the course and the classes run for forty-two minutes. Nora notes that now that they have another high school art teacher and more art offerings the numbers are a little lower for some courses than usual. She explained the benefits of small class sizes, "It's very nice, the kids who need a lot of help, can get a lot of help. I've had much larger (classes) in the past, when it was just me and there were fewer scheduling options and less sections and they were kind of pushing everyone together. It's nice to have the ability to spread it out a little bit more. It's a lot better for the kids."

Budget

Nora indicated that she is pretty satisfied with the budget she has for her classroom materials. She noted that more money is always nice, but she is realistic about what the district can afford. She commented, "For what I'm currently teaching, for the most part, it's pretty good. I do use every penny of it. If I had more money, you better believe I would find things to use it on. But I don't know. I'm like, I know, it's not going to grow significantly at this point. So, I find my ways to make it work." She has found ways to stretch her budget by soliciting materials from faculty and the community and finding workarounds for materials such as sketchbooks. Through her RIT online art teacher network, Nora discovered that sketchbooks can be ordered as textbooks. She recalled, "I was very happy several years ago when I actually learned from the RIT network group on Facebook that you can put sketchbooks under the textbook line on budget ordering so that they're not coming from your regular class supply order. So, I order sketchbooks as a textbook order every year. …I was like, game changer!"

Nora frequently puts out requests to faculty and staff for materials she is looking for for upcoming projects. She also has community members and parents who offer materials knowing she likes to use unusual materials and recycled objects with her students. She notes that this is something she has worked on over the years, communicating with colleagues and community members and asking for materials. She shared, "… at this point, I have several colleagues who know what kind of art materials that I'm always looking for. Like interesting surfaces to paint on and stuff like that. Or I will frequently… like I just recently emailed the staff and said, 'Hey,

while everyone's getting ready for the holidays, if anyone has any pieces of Styrofoam…' and I described what I was looking for, 'we can use it for this new project that we're doing.' And the next day three people brought stuff in for me. So, they're always really good about that."

Nora describes how her principal is supportive of materials and projects she does with the students, she reflected, "Like, I'm planning a project I wanna do with my tenth graders. Where we're gonna be using plastic/gels and black masking tape to do like an art installation on the windows on the second floor that's looks like stained glass windows. And I looked up a bunch of different ways to do it, and then I just emailed my principal and I said, 'Hey I want to do this and just wanna make sure it's not gonna be an issue with fire code or anything I just need your approval'. And he was just like, 'yeah, absolutely go for it'." This demonstrates Nora's ability to be resourceful when it comes to budgeting and developing creative and engaging art lessons for her students. She explained, "There are projects I would love to try. But I'm like, we can't afford that. But we also, I think, do pretty well with what we can afford. But I also get really creative. And I do spend some of my own money every year on stuff. … Like, I know, that's the way it's gonna be."

She added that with the new 3D program the district bumped up the budget to purchase ceramic materials such as a kiln and wheels and materials for glazing and clay. She noted that the increase was temporary and that like her program, materials for the program will have to be built up over time. She explained,

> …starting a ceramics program is not just buying a kiln, there's like a lot of stuff that goes with it. That will have to be added to every year. Like you won't be able to get everything all at once. But so, there's things that we have that I have slowly built up over the years like I really enjoy block printing, so I have expanded what we have for that over the years when it used to be fairly slim pickings.

She added, "…there's certain things I'm like, I would love to be able to do, but it doesn't make sense money wise to do it for the amount of what the kids get out of it." She is also careful about her spending and maintaining an inventory of materials. She described, "I also watch what I'm ordering. Very, very carefully. I have records going back to when I first started teaching here to be like, okay, how many of these things did I use? And I have kids help me do inventory at the end of the year. I'm very careful about loaning out materials to other people, depending on what they're asking for, like, I definitely have a collection of, like, junk construction paper where I'm like, sure, help yourself to this."

Curriculum

When sharing her experiences with curriculum development and lesson planning, Nora stated that when she first started teaching at South Jr/Sr High School, 15 years ago, the district had a person in charge of curriculum development. She stated that the district was, "at the tail end of (them) doing some really in-depth curriculum mapping. And then when she left (the following year) that all went away." Nora commented that she has "never been told what to

teach." She has always submitted lesson plans for her observations and followed the state's guidelines for art curriculum standards. She attributed the "trust" of her administration when it comes to her arts curriculum, to the transparency of her program. She explained, "I am really, really, good about promoting what we're doing, sharing it out with the community through the newsletter, the district website, sharing stuff, with administration, constantly changing displays, like there's no mystery about what we're doing. Because it's right out there for everyone to see."

The previous art teacher left materials and lesson plans that Nora could look to for guidance when she first started teaching. She remembered that she used some of the lessons her first year to transition herself and the students into her approach to art programming. She reflected, "I went through everything to see what they were doing. Some of the stuff I kind of carried over the first year because there were some kids who were very unhappy that she had retired. But then every year that went by I, I'm always reflecting and making changes. So, and the more experience I got, the more I've done with everything." Over the years, Nora has tried different lessons and approaches to teaching her content. She enjoys the diversity of approaches one can use when teaching art, "Yeah, I don't do all of the same stuff every year, that would be boring for everyone." She commented that a pro of this "autonomy" with curriculum is, "I can make the lessons and the department work the way I want it to work." Later when the subject of autonomy came up again, she added, "Well, I would say it really gives me the opportunity to teach the kids about the kinds of art that I'm excited about. Uh, and like I can make the curriculum fit that. I'm not being dictated to by someone higher up about no you can only do this. If there's something new, that I'm excited about, that I can bring in and try with the kids, that we haven't done before, I can. And there isn't anything stopping me from doing that."

She reflected upon the cons of autonomy when she described her early days of being a singleton art teacher, "But the cons are that you're lacking people to bounce ideas off and have that collective brainstorming or people that turn to for advice when you're having difficulty with the situation. I was lucky in that my mentor teacher was our school librarian and did have a fine art background originally before she went back and got her librarian degree. So, she was helpful when it came to asking someone for advice, even if it wasn't the same as, like, collaborating with another art teacher. So, I did the best as I could, but I also frequently, in years when things were busier and I was really on my own, I found myself really thinking I really wish I had a partner to work with."

She recalled a time when the elementary art teacher was teaching middle school classes in her building and having time to communicate with her more, "The elementary art teacher and I we would talk when she was over in the building first period for whatever middle school class they had her teaching at the time. I would try to check in with her. When we had to talk about some stuff. Things that we needed to work on art teacher wise and it was nice because I did have the opportunity to collaborate with her a bit more." Recently the district has hired another full-time art teacher who teaches middle school art, ceramics, and sculpture classes. Her classroom is in an outbuilding separate from the high school across the driveway from the entrance nearest

Nora's classroom. The third teacher, who teaches at both the elementary and middle schools, no longer teaches classes in the high school. Nora described her interactions with her art colleagues this way,

> However, frequently because she (elementary teacher) is so busy, and even because our new second art teacher's schedule is so busy, we very rarely have any common overlapping time during the day. Even when it comes to that activity period at the end of the day because we have kids for various things. We're trying to get kids in our room to work. I will, when I'm on hall duty, I will at least once a week, try to make a point stopping into the high school art teacher's room to check in with her. Talk with her about stuff and she'll sometimes try to come over when she has time at the end of the day. So, we do talk, but it's not like we have common planning time and then it's not like, for example, our math teachers, that are next door to each other or our English teachers that are across the hall from each other. It's a little different but we do the best we can with the situation.

Nora described how she looks to resources outside her district for curriculum planning. She explained, "Yeah, it's just I'm always looking at stuff constantly, constantly … I follow other art teachers on Instagram, on Twitter, I follow stuff on Pinterest. Like, I'm just always looking at things and saving things and thinking, how would I do that? And the wheels never stop turning." She also described having access to other artists and teacher friends who she shares resources with. Her and her husband are both practicing artist and between the two of them she described a large library of art books she can reference for information and ideas. Additionally, Nora is naturally curious, she described it this way,

> I'll find like on this bulletin board. I'll find examples from other artists that I print out. There's a lot of times I'll find something I want to use for, like, a practice worksheet, and there will be things about it I just don't like, so I make my own stuff a lot of the time, which being fluent in Photoshop, and things like that helps. But I make a lot of my own things. And some of the art projects, they're things that are just stuff I've completely come up with on my own too. So, it's, it's a good mix of inventing and building on the shoulders of others. That kind of stuff.

Recently, with the addition of a new high school 3D art teacher, Nora described plans for developing the program so they can meet the criteria for implementing an Individual Arts Assessment Pathway (IAAP) for graduation. This is a new initiative being launched by the N.Y.S. Education Department that allows arts-minded students to use their arts courses towards graduation fulfillment. The details of the program and implementation are still unfolding, but Nora noted that she believes this is the direction the district is going. She also noted that if the district wants to implement this program, she and her colleague would need professional development time to learn about the details of the requirements and devise a curriculum plan for implementation, she explained, "I met with our principal about it at the end of last year, and that's definitely the direction they want us to go in. They are trusting us to kind of put it together. And I've told them I want to bring in someone from BOCES to help with some guidance on this, because there's still a lot of question marks." She described times when the state or district

shifted gears towards a new initiative and then later abandoned it. She is hopeful that this initiative will not meet the same fate. She stated, "And hopefully, they'll, they'll keep going with it. Because they might just build it in the air and then just drop it and then that'll be as has happened, it goes many other ways, which I'm, I'm also like, that's a lot of work to do. Like there's many things that we've put a lot of work in that then they're like, yeah, we're not doing this anymore."

Nora and her high school colleague have been attending BOCES provided Arts Leadership Workshops together this year. This has provided them some time to work together and share ideas for curriculum and program development. Nora noted that she tries to visit her H.S. colleague's classroom at least once a week, even if it is just for a brief hello. Last year, Nora served as the district mentor for this new art teacher when she joined the district as a part-time middle school art instructor. This year the two educators try to make time to meet, although it is difficult with their busy schedules and teaching responsibilities. Nora noted that she is hopeful that they will be able to meet more frequently in the future, especially to hash out the details of their program and scheduling going forward. Currently, the only common planning time the art department has is their monthly meeting time. Nora explained, "They (the district administrators) would probably view our required monthly department meetings as our common time. But it is up to the department chair to set the meetings and organize everything and everyone's meetings are happening on different days and things like that." She continued, "(We meet) Once a month for roughly half an hour during activity period time, that includes art and music, it's a mix of us meeting in person but also using Google Meet for the teachers who are in the elementary school so that they don't have to waste time driving over."

When asked about other opportunities to collaborate with her colleagues, Nora noted,

So, frequently when we have our Superintendent days, they'll mark time in the afternoon for us to work together on stuff, but frequently, we need a whole day. And they have us doing so many other things in the mornings and then we go to lunch and then they'll schedule other meetings in the afternoon and by the time you look at it, sometimes it's like, oh you have an hour to work in your department. Granted, if we made a case for it and asked for the time, my principal would probably give it to us. The only thing that's really hard right now is there is not nearly enough sub coverage at our school, and I know other schools it's the same problem.

Nora commented that she feels bad if she takes time away from school for professional development or personal reasons because of the sub shortage and that it may fall upon her colleagues to cover her classes. She confesses, "Yes and I like, I want to ask for the time for things, but I also feel really bad when I find out that other teachers have been made to cover my class."

Access

When asked about student access to her classroom outside of class time, Nora commented, "Oh, all the time? Yeah, yeah. Kids stop in, they have to have a pass, which I try to really enforce with them, because it's too easy for it to become like a hangout space. And I want them to feel welcome in here. But I still want it to be like a working studio and not just like, hey, let's go hang out in the art room." Nora also described how she frequently interacts with her non-art colleagues. She has made it a point to make herself visible in the school. She engages with the teachers that are her hallmates and often seeks out others to find out what they are doing and explore opportunities to collaborate and engage students. She described soliciting students to work on school projects for community service credit. She notes that communicating about what the art students are doing and finding out how she can tie their art learning to other disciplines and activities is an important part of advocating for her program.

She provided this example,

> Like, for example, the English teacher. I interact with her a lot now because she also does our school newspaper. So, now she will contact me, or I will approach her, just depending on how our schedules work. She'll say, like, coming up, hey, we're gonna be doing a winter issue, have any kids done any winter themed art that we could include? Or do you know a student who could draw XYZ for us? Or I'll approach her and say, hey, my kids have done this cool thing, would you guys like to do a story on it? She's like, yes, absolutely.

School and Community Support

Nora noted that she uses this same approach to advocacy when it comes to generating community awareness and support for the art program. "Yeah. So, I mean, for the most part, anyone who's involved with staff at the school, whether it's a parent or an administrator, they know who I am, even if they don't know my name, it's like, 'oh, you're the art teacher.' Just because I'm out there doing stuff," remarked Nora. Over the years she has made it a point to volunteer to help with a variety of community activities. Additionally, she manages the set design for the drama club and sees this as an opportunity to get her students and parents involved with arts activities. Nora stated, "I feel like I've helped to build the community involvement awareness, a lot." She continued, "I started doing that pretty early on, helping with set design, recruiting kids to help paint, getting, finding kids and getting them more involved in things. And I'm not a theatre person (background) at all. But I was like, let's get some kids painting some stuff and get them involved, which has been a good way to help get more parents involved and aware of things…"

Nora described the Night of the Arts program she initiated to foster community awareness and showcase her districts arts program. She stated,

> I started our Night of the Arts art show that we have here. They never had a big art show. And we started doing that. And I bring over work from our elementary teacher from her sixth-grade classes. We hang that up with the high school kids' stuff and then we arrange for the kids over at the elementary school to have like a

field trip day where we leave the show up for a couple days and they come over they walk through, and they see everything. I try to bring some of my older students down there too, because then the little kids are always like, oh my gosh, this is gonna be me eventually, and it just gets them excited about it for when they get up here, eventually. Parents have had really good feedback about the show, they get excited about it. And we pair it with one of our concert nights where it's an arts night. That's a combination band and chorus concert. So, we get a lot of people through here. And it's had a really good response.

Nora added, "…I remember the first time we did the show and took over the first-floor hallway. The other teachers who had never seen that before, they all came out and they were like, oh, my gosh, oh my gosh, there's so much artwork! They knew what we do, but they also had no idea." Communication has also been important to Nora when it comes to generating support and awareness. She stated, "I'm always, always sharing things out, which I think has helped just make it more noticeable in the community."

When asked about support from the district, Nora reflected that that has fluctuated over the years. She described it as follows,

In terms of administrative support, it's better now than it was. It was rough for a couple years, especially during COVID. I know everyone was going through it. But people were not always as understanding as they could have been when it came for demands that were being made. It's a lot better now than it was like, two, three years ago. Because like I said, when we were hybrid teaching, I was like, I think I might quit. I also think it's gotten better over the years because I've been very vocal when something has been wrong. I won't just sit there quietly. At one point, when the elementary teacher was coming over to teach the middle school classes, the way they did the schedule, I didn't have a quiet planning period. They were in here during my planning period for their class, which is really hard when you're trying to layout artwork to grade and stuff like that. So, I made a big stink about that. And that eventually went away. So, things have happened, but I think because I will speak up about things. (Be your own advocate.) Yes. So, I would say right now we're at a good place.

Nora noted that her current administration is supportive of the arts program. The addition of a second full-time high school art teacher and expansion of the visual arts program to include courses in 3D art creation are two examples of this support.

When it came to her art colleagues Nora commented, "So, we do talk, but it's not like we have common planning time and then it's not like, for example, our math teachers, that are next door to each other or our English teachers that are across the hall from each other. It's a little different but we do the best we can with the situation. Additionally, Nora noted that the other singleton arts teachers, band and chorus, were sources of support "because you can talk to them, and they completely understand everything that goes into being the only one."

Student Art Opportunities Outside of School

Besides art club, drama, and other extra-curricular activities the school provided, Nora could not recall any local community programs for the arts that students could access outside of school. She commented on the availability of art related field trips, she stated, "I wish there were more, good, free, art related field trips. Because yes, we do have Arts in Ed, but our school had money run out in February last year. And then like, if I wanted to get kids tickets to see an art exhibit or something, I don't feel right, asking the kids to pay for that, because I know, they all come from different backgrounds." She described the logistics of the trips she has done or tried to do in this way,

> I will take kids to Baltimore Woods with their sketchbooks for a hiking/sketching field trip, because that's free. And it's also in the area. I have partnered with the physics teacher, who's next door to me, in the past, when he takes kids to Cornell in the spring. I'll team up with him for the bus ride. I'll take the kids to Cornell to take them to the art museum, which is free admission. I've tried to do the Corning Glass Museum in the past, it's a little too far out and back in a day. And then there were issues with getting the tickets paid for. And finally, I was like, you know what, it's not gonna happen. I had to scrap that one. I have taken kids to the zoo in the past to draw the animals with their sketchbooks getting it paid for through Arts in Ed, if it wasn't paid for, I wouldn't do it.

She also noted the difficulty of having enough teachers for chaperones for field trips. She described trips where she had only one other teacher for over twenty students. Due to the sub shortage, there have been times when teachers had their subs pulled at the last minute simply because the school did not have enough coverage for the classrooms. This added another layer of difficulty in providing opportunities outside of school for students to engage in art experiences.

Personal Artmaking

Nora is a practicing artist and maintains a website where she displays her work. She noted, "When I travel, even when I go hiking, I frequently bring a sketchbook with me and draw. When traveling, you know, I'll stop at the top of the mountain while hiking and I'll draw up there and I'll bring some of that sketchbook work back in to use with the kids, but I also use it as inspiration for my own painting work, I'm going to do." She also models artmaking for her students. Each year Nora and her advanced students create portraits of children from around the world who are faced with substantial challenges such as extreme poverty, war, homelessness, etc. for the Memory Project (https://www.memoryproject.org/). These portraits are then given to the children as a gift and symbol of support and kindness.

Challenges

When describing the challenges of being a singleton art teacher in a small rural school district, Nora described the following challenges: time, lack of understanding of the nature of art content, curriculum development, scheduling, and being the only one. Nora reflected on

interactions with art teacher friends who work in larger districts, she noted, "It sometimes blows their mind, like how much I do." She described it this way,

> It is that you very much feel that you are stuck doing everything. Like it's not like, say you were working at a school where you were one of, like, four art teachers in that building. As a department, one person could be like, okay, I'm gonna be the person who sends the pictures to the newsletter and another person be like alright I'm gonna do this other promotional thing, another person could say alright, I'm gonna spearhead this stuff for the art show. There's no division of labor when you're a singleton. You're doing everything and there's no way around it.

She also described how important it is to her to do her job well and the stress that goes along with having a strong work ethic and high expectations for herself and meeting her students' needs. She explained,

> But the other thing too is that when you are someone who likes to make sure that you're providing everything that you can for your students. That you're not someone that can just say, oh, well, whatever, they're just not going to be doing anything. And it's just not part of your nature and your personality, it's a tremendous amount of (stress). I'm like, if I'm going to do something, I'm going to do something well. I will say, I've gotten better about saying no to things. I've gotten better about being like, you know what, this is okay, this is good enough. It will work for what we're doing. But I don't like feeling like I'm failing at something. And I don't like feeling like I'm failing someone, especially students in that kind of situation. It's just a horrible feeling.

Nora noted, "When we are doing curriculum stuff for the state or when I'm trying to develop new lessons and I'm literally on my own." She continued, "I did the best as I could, but I also frequently, in years when things were busier and I was really on my own, I found myself really thinking I really wish I had a partner to work with." She described time she wished she had had "people to turn to for advice when you're having difficulty with a situation." She described a time during the COVID pandemic she didn't feel understood and supported by her administrator. She identified that the administrator didn't understand the demands of art content teaching and failed in supporting her as a singleton educator. She explained,

> I don't think they fully understood, because as I remember, and granted he's great now, but at the time when they moved me to teaching all of the middle school classes. They dumped it on me in the middle of a week in October. My principal called me in, and I was like, I have a lot of concerns about this, because I'm already really overwhelmed right now. And the response was, well, we're all overwhelmed right now. There was (like) zero sympathy.

Nora describes how it is different at a small school where one art teacher is teaching several art mediums such as painting, drawing, printmaking, design, etc. Larger districts often have content specialists in different areas of visual art instruction at the high school level. A teacher may teach multiple sections of drawing or painting with another teacher teaching

printmaking or sculpture. In smaller districts, the singleton art teacher's schedule is much different. Nora explained,

> I think that what always kind of makes me sit back and look at it with a different perspective is when I'm talking to someone who is also an art teacher in another district, but they're in a larger school and they might only teach two to three different kinds of art classes, multiple sections, but two different sections. And then especially when I was a 7-12 teacher, they would ask, we would be at like a barbecue or something, and they'd asked me what classes I teach and I would tell them and they would always be like how, how is that possible? That's insane. I was like well, I'm here, I'm doing it.

Nora explained that the "core classes" often drive the schedule for art classes making it difficult to have consistency with collaborations with other teachers or even just managing the availability of courses for students. She noted, "…a lot of times they will plug in all of the core classes. And then they plug in the art classes, my schedule, even though I might be teaching the same sections. It's never the same from year to year." There are elective courses Nora "would love to teach" and her students are interested in but there simply isn't any room for it in her schedule. She is "all booked up."

Making time for professional development away from school has also had its challenges. Nora described the difficulty in planning for a substitute teacher early on in her career. The amount of preparation it took to have another person teaching her content for the day was overwhelming. She has learned to simplify her plans and expectations. She recalled, "I used to hate putting in for a sub and then I realized I was making it more work than it needed to be. So, I've got to the point where I'm, like, if they're just doing sketchbook work for the day that's fine, I'm fine with it." She laughed as she described "tiptoeing in the next morning, when I open the door and be like, oh God, what's it gonna look like." She does, however, admit that sometimes she declines professional development opportunities that are scheduled at times when she is particularly busy with her classroom responsibilities. This year, with the addition of a new high school 3D art teacher, Nora has taken professional development time to collaborate with the new teacher and attend BOCES sponsored Arts Leadership workshops. She described being hopeful for the future of the program and having a partner to build things going forward. She humbly stated, "I mean, it is what I've made it, basically. I've worked really hard at it while I've been here. There's always room to improve things. There are always things to change. But I think part of the reason we're at where we're at now, is because of all the blood sweat and tears I've put into it over the years."

Nora notes that art curriculum planning takes "a lot of time." She noted that "Even when it gets to a point where I have, say a good, strong, solid lesson that I've developed over a few years, and I know I'm going to use that lesson every year, there's still new lessons that I'm always developing, because I don't like to repeat everything." At times being a singleton can be overwhelming. Nora explained,

I put a lot of time into it (lesson planning), a lot of effort, I spend time organizing it, practicing it, everything. But when you're doing that for four different classes, four different grade levels, sometimes I sit down and I look at like even this week with report cards, and the musical and new lessons and just all other stuff that's needed. It's one of those things sometimes I like, look at and I'm like, I don't know what to prioritize, like, which task do I focus on first, and it's almost a little bit of like a mental paralysis. And I'm like, just pick one small thing and get that done and then go to the next. But it is, a little like, not overwhelming. But it's I don't like when I have too many things on the to do list. And it goes in ups and downs throughout the school year. But with the way our marking periods are, when it gets to the end of the marking period, I'm always like, there's a lot on the plate right now.

Nora often brings work home. She admitted, "There's always work that has to come home. Yeah. If I were to drop everything at 3pm and just leave it at that and then come in the next day and just pick up where it was. This wouldn't be the classroom that it is because it takes that much extra time."

Skills for Success

Nora has been a strong advocate for the arts program at South Jr/Sr High School. She recognized early on that as a singleton she would have to be the driving force for the arts program and for her students' wants and needs. When she described skills that have helped her be successful as a singleton teacher over the years she stated, "I would say, you can't be shy. Because you'll get walked over, and the program will not survive, you have to be able to have a voice to be able to share opinions, and just be able to speak your mind. Or I should say, not be afraid to speak your mind." She also identified her ability to approach other teachers, "I'm not afraid to approach another teacher and say, hey, I have this idea. Is this something that we collaborate on? Sometimes it pans out, sometimes it doesn't." Nora admitted, "I will say it's much rarer for someone to approach me. It's Usually me approaching them. If they do approach me, it's because they're like, 'Hey, can we have some paper for this poster project we're doing' like that kind of thing."

There have been times in Nora's career that she has had to stand up for herself and for the arts program. She noted that "when you're on your own like that, you have to do it. No one's going to do it for you. And if you don't do it and nothing changed, nothing going to improve." She described having to fight for pay increases for arts related responsibilities and choosing her battles. She explained, "I also pushed for them (administration) to raise the pay for the Fine Arts Department Chair because it was not equal across the board. The other department chairs were paid more. So, I have to pick what I fought for each time we did contract renegotiations. Am I gonna fight the department chair pay or am I gonna fight for the set design pay. And that's again, me being a thorn in their side but telling them, like, you need to take this seriously."

Nora has learned to say no. She stated, "…I mean it's just it's really hard sometimes feeling like you have to do all the things because there's no one else to do it. I've gotten better

about saying no to things. Like, I will not, I made it a rule for myself, where I will not do extra-curricular things at school that are not related to art." She has learned to be very organized and teaches her students how to be self-sufficient. For example, she explained,

> I label everything. I use lots of labels to organize. I am very big on using bins to help separate and organize things. Um, or depending on the project that we're doing and how my class schedule is like that year, sometimes I'll have wheeled cards set up with like, okay these are all printing supplies tenth grade is using. So, I can wheel it out for them and then push it back to the back of the room at the end of the period to get them out of the way of the younger kids so they're not messing with it. The kids having their own individual art bins helps a lot. I also don't want to be fetching supplies for them all the time. I want them to be able to be self-sufficient and be accountable for their own materials.

Nora is dedicated to her own development as an artist and educator. She seeks out resources and describes herself as a "creative problem-solver." She uses resources such as books, the Internet, and social media to follow artists and get ideas and examples for her lessons. She noted, "I will watch tutorials. I will read things. I am no stranger to even using YouTube to figure out how to do something." She continued, "I'm not afraid to get my hands dirty and make some bad art before I make some not bad art."

In addition to being an advocate, organizer, creative problem-solver, resourceful and life-long learner, Nora described the times she reached out to friends, family and fellow art teachers to get advice. She described long conversations with a college friend and fellow art teacher during COVID just to discuss "How are you doing this?" Early in her career she relied upon her RIT art teacher network on Facebook for support. She described one of her best supporters as being her husband. He is a practicing artist and even though he is not an art teacher having another creative mind to share ideas and work through creative challenges has been an asset to her singleton experience.

Advantages of a Small District

When describing the advantages of working as a singleton in a small rural district, Nora described the merits of a smaller school this way,

> At some of the bigger districts, they had a lot more resources, sometimes. But it's like a whole different set of expectations, both from administrators and parents and the kids. It's just, it's a very different vibe. And one thing I think, and this isn't true of every school district by any means, but I do think at a smaller school like this, if you have made yourself an active part of the community, people appreciate what you're doing so much more, but you can also see that because you're the only person doing something or one of only two people doing it, what you do does make a difference. And sometimes at bigger schools, I would be like, what I'm doing doesn't really matter here. Like, I don't know, I just I feel like you can see the impact that you make much more at a smaller school.

Nora described the continued relationships she has with students that graduated 10-12 years ago and how much she values that dynamic in a small school setting where you can build strong relationships with your students.

Nora also describes the autonomy that comes with teaching in a small district where you are the only one in your content specialty. She stated, "Well, I would say it really gives me the opportunity to teach the kids about the kinds of art that I'm excited about. I can make the curriculum fit that. I'm not being dictated to by someone higher up about, no you can only do this. If there's something new, that I'm excited about, that I can bring in and try with the kids, that we haven't done before, I can. And there isn't anything stopping me from doing that." She continued,

> I mean, it is a responsibility. But I'm comfortable with being able to or being the one who has to call the shots with what's going on with the program. Because to some extent, I can make sure the kids are learning about things I'm excited about. And it's not like, oh, we have to teach them this one specific thing right now. And I really hate this lesson. There isn't really any of that. If there's a lesson I don't like, I will find a different way to teach the concept so that they're still getting the concept, but I don't have to teach it in a way that I really hate. Just because someone else said, that's how we have to teach it…Yeah. And if you want the freedom, then you got to have the responsibility.

In this statement Nora recognized the responsibility that comes with being a singleton art educator in a small district.

Characteristics and Wants

When considering the necessary skills Nora identified as associated with her singleton experience and the benefits of a small school environment, Nora also described other characteristics of singleton-ness. She referenced one disadvantage of being the "only one". She explained it this way,

> You sometimes don't know you don't know something until you hear about it from someone else. And then, I'm like, why did no one tell me about this earlier? Like the first example, the sketchbooks, that you can put them in as a textbook order. We didn't have that initially and I was figuring out how to do it from my budget. And I was really stressing my budget and then when I found out through my teacher network. I was like, how did we not know this, how did we not know that we can do this? So, just finding something out and then finding out that other art teachers have known about it for years, sometimes, like, oh my God. This could have saved me so much trouble.

She continued, "Some of the most helpful things I found out have been (through) like casual conversations at those workshops, not in the guided sessions." Nora described times when she reached out to other art teacher groups seeking the collegial guidance and support she did not

have in her singleton teaching experience. She explained the demands of her singleton position and the need for a network of support this way,

> You have to be able to wear many hats. And, like, you're not just an art teacher. So much goes into it to make it work on its own when you are alone, because I mean, I will seek out PD, it's not given to me, there isn't like a curriculum director or anything like that. Or if I want to collaborate with someone, I have to make that happen, people aren't coming to me, I have to go to them. Or you are your (own) promotional team. If you want to promote your program, you are the one doing that. When you're a singleton teacher, you are the one recruiting for your program, you are the one advocating for your program, you are not just a teacher.

She added, "… it would be nice if there was a more structured professional network of like, artists who are willing to come and visit classrooms or studios that you could go and visit or plan fieldtrips." When it came to her content learning Nora describe an "ideal world" where art teacher colleagues and artists could get together and share knowledge and resources and bring that back to their students, she envisioned it this way,

> I mean, in an ideal world, if time and finances and all the stars aligned to allow it, I would love to be able to take some kind of a studio class, studio skills class outside of work, that could count as professional development, like, go to a painting workshop once a week or go to a ceramics workshop once a week, something like that some kind of hands on making art skills type thing. Again, if the stars align in an ideal world, to me, that would almost be the most valuable kind of professional development because I think it's important to not just, when it comes to making art, I think it's important to not just practice being a teacher, but practice being a student. And because if you're learning how to do something, then you can better verbalize how to do that to your students.

Here Nora described the value of collegial interaction with art content peers. She recognized a value in diversity of teaching methods, styles, and content knowledge. She went on to explain it this way, "And even when I was in my grad school program, for my teaching degree, as part of it, we were required to be taking some studio classes while we were doing our teaching degree, and I found it so valuable to be doing that, at the same time, we were learning to be a teacher, because it made me view everything differently." She continued, "Even if it's something that I have experience with, I don't care, teach me something, thinking like, I know nothing about it, because I find it helpful to see how other people teach."

Nora went on to describe a lending library for art teachers she had access to during her teacher preparation program. The graduate program partnered with a local museum that would give teachers access to resources such as posters, books, and art examples. She noted that when she was starting out at South Jr/Sr High School she didn't have access to such resources and had to build up her resource library over time. She commented, "It is really hard, especially when you're just starting out, to build up good resources without having to spend a lot of your own

money and your own time. And if you had like, a collaborative pool of things that you could share from, that can be a really awesome thing for people to have."

She admitted that although such a resource would be great to have, it would take someone besides a singleton teacher to make it happen. She uses herself here as an example, "I'm like, it would be great if all this stuff existed. But I know with what I'm doing now, I'm like, I'm not the one who can make it happen. I'm like, I would love to have these things. And I will I frequently like, even in meetings, I'll be like, don't suggest this idea, don't suggest this idea. Because then it's going to become your responsibility." Nora describes here the frustration that comes with a heavy workload. Her "plate is full" and although she recognizes the value in collaboration and participation in professional development learning, it is not something she feels she can make happen on her own. She commented, "That would be a great task for, like a curriculum director, right, to be like, I'm going to spearhead putting this thing together and gathering things from local teachers and stuff. That would be great. That's not something that a singleton teacher can put together on their own, and nor should they have to." South Jr/Sr High School does not have a curriculum director and Nora and her district colleagues are tasked with developing their own art curriculum and finding professional development opportunities that meet their needs. At the end of the day, it is left up to Nora to find the time, resources, and supports she needs to be an effective singleton art teacher. She explained,

> I like my job. I like what I do. I wish I had more time. Sometimes I go home, and I'm like, I feel like I did not do that much effective teaching today, because I was also doing XYZ trying to get all the things done. And it's, I don't know, I am, like, I just want to teach. That's all I want to do. I don't want to do all the other stuff. I do it because I have to, but I just want to teach.

Here Nora described the frustration of being a singleton and how the added tasks that come with being the only one to do them, can affect her teaching and her ability to be "in the moment" with her students.

Summary

Nora's singleton story described a passionate, resilient, outspoken advocate for art learning. Nora has worked hard to advocate for the art program at South Jr/Sr High School. She has spoken up when she needed to demand equal value, equal pay, for art related duties that is in line with what other "core" teachers receive. She sought out resources on her own to supplement her classroom environment and promote student learning. She described times she had to reach out to colleagues, family, and friends outside of the school environment to find the support and guidance she needed when that support was not available in the district.

Nora described how she is not afraid to engage with other educators and parents in her district. She recognizes the value in developing these relationships and how this "visibility' is important to how people perceive the program and develop value for the art(s). Nora described ways she engages the students, both in her classes and those who are not able to take art classes,

by including them in community service initiatives and school activities such as creating the set designs for the school drama program and the "Night of the Arts" program. She combined social studies learning, worldwide outreach, and artmaking by having students participate in the Memory Project.

Nora has been able to foster interest among her colleagues about what goes on in her art classroom by engaging them in conversations and finding ways to collaborate towards common goals. She is enthusiastic about exploring new project ideas and often solicits recycled materials from the staff and community members. Additionally, Nora maintains an arts newsletter and uses tools like the school web site and hall TV display monitors to share examples of student work. Over the years, Nora has built a "Night of the Arts" program that features both visual and performing arts. The community has come to anticipate and enjoy this event, furthering the visibility of what art(s) means to the students, school, and community culture.

Nora included in her description of skills she values in her singleton experience, art advocacy and self-advocacy, organization, love of learning, creative problem-solving, willingness to seek out support, outgoingness, collegiality, curiosity and being a self-starter, relationship building – with students, colleagues, and community members. Nora identified that along with the autonomy she has as a singleton educator in a small rural district, she must assume responsibility. She likes to do things to the best of her ability and has had to learn to say no when the request is not related to her objectives as an art educator. She has also recognized that "you don't know what you don't know" making it important to seek out opportunities for conversations and professional development learning with other art educators and artists.

Ultimately, Nora describes an "ideal world" where art educators could have a community network to share information about art opportunities for teachers and students. A network where teachers could explore and learn from one another. Additionally, Nora described a need for a mechanism to help connect teachers to resources such as posters, books, art examples, and information about places to take student to engage in art and artists who are willing to visit schools and do programming with students and teachers. In Nora's "ideal world" the art teacher should be both learner and teacher, expanding her perspective and developing her methods for teaching. For a singleton teacher, according to Nora, the daily tasks of supporting an art program on your own make it difficult to take on the responsibility of an initiative to develop collaborations outside of your school community. As it is, Nora noted, the art educators in the district have very little opportunity to collaborate. Being a singleton art educator and sole advocate for your program is demanding.

Nora has worked hard over the years to get the art program to a place of school and community wide recognition. Additionally, the district recently demonstrated support for the growth of the program by adding another full-time middle school/ high school art teacher and implementing 3D sculpture and ceramics courses. Nora was excited and hopeful for the future of the program. She noted that there is always more to do, but this addition is a positive

development for the program. Not only does it add to the opportunities for visual arts learning for the students, but it also provides new potential for collaboration and collegiality among these art educators.

Smith's Story ~ South Jr/Sr High School

Teacher Background Demographics

Ms. Smith (pseudonym) has been teaching art in public schools for ten years. This is her second-year teaching at South JR/SR High School (pseudonym) which serves 328 students in grades seven through twelve. Smith teaches seventh and eighth grade art, high school ceramics, and high school sculpture and has a study hall duty. There is one other high school art teacher whose room is in another building and an elementary art teacher who travels between the elementary and middle school buildings in the district.

Ms. Smith grew up in this rural community and graduated from South High School. She described her upbringing as always being "surrounded by art." Her mother is a watercolorist, and her father is a general contractor. "I was always around art and building and tinkering and all those things," remarked Smith, "I suppose that is how I ended up a sculptor!" Smith reflected upon traveling to the art store with her mother and watching her painting and going to classes and always having her own work bench in the garage. "You know, unlimited amounts of scrap wood and nails and tools and things. It was like, that's what we did." "It is funny coming back here," Smith commented, "the teachers who are still here, that I once had, say 'you were always so artistic when you were younger.' It was kind of a known thing."

Smith described art in high school as her "reason to go to school." She reflected upon struggling quite a bit in high school and finding sanctuary in the art classroom and with her high school art teacher, Miss Murphy. "Miss Murphy, who was the art teacher here, was the reason I graduated." For Smith, the art classroom and her art teacher created a place of belonging. This feeling of belonging stuck with her and inspired the vision she has for her own art classroom and the community she wishes to create for her students.

At first, Smith was not sure what she wanted to do after graduation. Initially she pursued biology at Springfield College in Massachusetts, later transferring to SUNY Plattsburg to pursue a bachelor's in fine arts in Sculpture and Ceramics and a minor in Art Therapy. Her path led her to a summer position as director of ceramics in Cape Cod and a sculpture internship in Salem, NY, then to Albuquerque, New Mexico and later out west to work in restaurant management. Smith described fighting her desire to pursue the arts. "I kind of fought it for a while. I didn't think I wanted to be in the arts…I had a moment when I was like, I am never going to have a career that I can retire (from)." She continued, "I knew I wanted to be a mom, and so education and having summers off and breaks, so like career wise that would be a route I would want to go. I don't know, it is something that has always been part of my life."

Smith reflected upon having natural dispositions for teaching and a desire to share art with others. "I always had something in me, you know, even when I was a babysitter, I would do art projects or teach different things. I thought if I can manage kitchen staff, then I can manage high schoolers (laughs). And I really, just didn't see myself wanting to be in that industry very

much longer. And felt like I wanted more worth." Smith continued, "So, I went back to school to be a teacher. And this is what I know how to do. This is what I love. It is natural." Smith recognized the skills she brings to the classroom, "I'm an organizer and I can manage materials and think creatively and help students come up with a weird project that they want to make. And I'm like, 'let's figure it out'. That's just my brain, that's how I act." Smith then enrolled in a one-year teacher preparation master's program at the University of Denver. She described the program as being an intensive, "gauntlet style" program that begins in the summer with three weeks of nine credits of concentrated instruction. Then, when the school year starts, teacher candidates teach in Denver Public School classrooms during the day and take classes at night. Smith reflected, "It was like can you do this program or not, because from day one of the school year to the end you were in the classroom." The program offered two courses in art education, one elementary education course and one secondary education course. The rest of the courses were in general education. According to Smith, her instruction did not include any content specifically targeting rural education. Her degree is in education with a concentration in Art Education K-12.

After graduation, Smith accepted a high school position in Denver Public School (DPS). She described DPS district as a small city with many schools and teachers. Denver Public School has a total student enrollment of 89,213 students and 4,780 classroom teachers. With 1,840 students in the high school where Smith taught. At DPS, Smith was one of five art content teachers and the only teacher teaching 3-dimensional art. Her courses were 9-12 Ceramics, Sculpture, and 3D Advanced Placement (AP). Although there were other art teachers in her school, they functioned as singletons in their content areas. When describing being part of a Professional Learning Community (PLC) Smith described it as being considered a waste of time, "They tried to do learning communities or PLC's. They tried having us on there and we fought against it because we were like, this is a waste of time. We are singleton teachers. You know, like, collaborating with a photography teacher is a waste of time." Smith described times she would trade places with a colleague drawing and painting teacher for art critiques just to provide the students with a different point of view. But this did not happen as "often as you would think it would with a team of teachers in a building."

Smith enjoyed having other arts teachers in her building, "You know... there was somebody you could decompress with at the end of the day. If you go and complain to a math teacher, they don't understand. Our classrooms are just so different, so it is nice to have that type of alignment in content a little bit. Where you can get, you know, your ups and downs are similar at least." Smith was at DPS for eight and a half years. During that time, she had six different school principals. She described the position as a "political steppingstone." Her job was fast paced with large class sizes and many students cycling through her program. She was very involved in the district's arts professional development initiatives. She was a regional team specialist and was on the hiring committee.

Smith reflected, "I was just too involved… and so it just burned me out. It was just too much and education went through a really hard time with COVID." Smith and her husband made the decision to move their family "back home" to Central New York. It was by chance that the art position at her alma mater was available. "This position opened up and I'm here. I'm like, this is fabulous!"

When asked if she had ever envisioned herself as a teacher and what did she imagine it would be like, Smith responded,

> Initially no, um so, Miss Murphy who was the teacher here was the teacher I wanted to be. And I used to have dreams about coming here, but literal dreams, like from what I remember it being when I was a highschooler. I was like no way, the teacher who is in that position is going to be there until they die. (laughs) And now I am the second full-time teacher here (in the junior/senior high school) ever in the history (of the district). That to me is really weird – on a different plane. When I reflect upon that, I think I never thought I would be at a little school. I really loved the school I was at, it was really diverse, and I loved the students and having a team. I never, ever, thought… and then with my growth as an educator… and I see it happening again, I get too involved… it is fantastic. It is nice to be in a little bubble and not… and maybe I am shooting myself in the foot after doing all of this digging trying to figure out how to connect… but that (PD) I know is really important. I know this because of the life I had before here. If I didn't have that before and I didn't know anything else and I don't know if be as ambitious to find out all of the information.

Smith paused here, reflecting upon how her journey has led her back to this moment, in this place. How her experiences, traveling and teaching in a larger more diverse district, have informed what she can bring to the students in the district she grew up in.

Teaching Philosophy

Smith's teaching experience in Colorado allowed her to obtain her probationary teacher certification in New York State and is now on tract to ern her permanent certification. She described changing states and districts as "I became a first-year teacher all over again. So that was a new experience for me. The demographics are much different." She described reflecting upon her teaching units and adjusting the pace and scope of the lessons to fit her new students and learning environment. She commented, "A big revelation I had at the beginning of the summer was that I have never worked where I knew who the elementary school teacher is." Having the opportunity to reach out to her students' elementary art teacher to find out what students know or need to learn was a new experience that did not happen in DPS where students fed into her high school from many different schools and teachers. Smith feels well prepared to teach her content but reflects that she needs to "slow down and calm down a bit." She attributed it to coming from a fast-paced urban setting to a slower-paced rural community.

Although Smith's experience was in an urban district, she did have the opportunity to have conversations with rural art teachers as an Art Education Association Conference presenter in Colorado. There she was able to talk with rural art teachers and learn about their programs and challenges. She reflected upon how having those experiences and growing up in this community and the experiences she had as an art student have played a role in her personal teaching philosophy and pedagogy.

Smith shared a personal experience with a friend from high school and how his story impacted her philosophy of teaching and learning. Earlier she had described how the art classroom was a haven for her as a growing and sometimes struggling adolescent. She noted how important it was for her to find a place where she belonged and felt that she was accepted. "I became an art teacher because my art teacher made a safe place where there was, like, no judgement, and I could go there, and I was accepted." Smith's friend did not have a place to belong in his high school experience. She described him as the student teachers warned about in the teachers' room, "Oh, watch out for him, you know…". And the student who always was blamed for bad behavior even if that time it wasn't his fault. He didn't like school and every teacher knew him as a troublemaker. She reflected that "He never got a chance to have a new teacher who didn't give him judgement." He went into the Army after high school and shortly before Smith began her teaching program, she found out he had committed suicide. She admitted she doesn't know what led him to this tragic decision but believes that the connection she can make with her students and creating a safe space for them to find belonging and acceptance, can make a difference in their lives, as it did in hers and she wished it had in his.

Smith described how in her previous position at DPS the students didn't necessarily know who she was. There were so many students and teachers that if they didn't have her specifically for an art class, they may not have ever known her or she them. Here, she noticed that the teachers know all the students by name. She looks forward to getting to that point too. "I have never had it so close knit." She described the upside and downside of a small community. She reflected upon puzzling through the balance between what she needs to know about students (from others) and what information she just doesn't need to know or would prefer to learn from her own experiences with the student. She noted that her own experience makes her aware of the importance of allowing her students to have the space to define (redefine) themselves in her classroom. She looks forward to creating that environment for her students and becoming a valued part of this learning community. She described these first years as a time of "figuring it out."

Teaching Environment

South Junior-Senior High School is in a small village nestled in a rural community in Central New York. According to census data this district is identified as Rural (41) Fringe. The district community population is 5,553 +/- 364 residents. The district serves 743 students across three school locations: Pre-K through second grade elementary school, third through sixth grade

middle school, and seventh through twelfth grade junior senior high school. The elementary school is in a suburban community on the *fringe* of a larger metropolitan area. The middle school and Jr/Sr high school are both located in a small village approximately seven miles from the elementary school location.

The middle and Jr/Sr high school buildings are both located on the same side of the road and are divided by a roadway and football field. The Jr/Sr high school building is located across the driveway from the outbuilding that houses the shop classroom and 3D art classroom where Ms. Smith's classroom is located. This classroom was reconfigured from a computer lab to accommodate the addition of a 3D art program. Last year the seventh and eighth grade art classes Ms. Smith teaches were taught in a different classroom within the main building. Ceramics and 3D art courses are taught in the outbuilding classroom. The classroom has a TV that projects from her computer but does not have a white board or chalk board.

The 3D art space was not originally designed for an art classroom and does not have adequate storage or space for larger projects and materials. Smith described it as "a VERY isolated place," Smith stated, "…getting to know staff members and have friend colleagues is what I miss the most about my last position." The intention of the district is to create a more appropriate 3D art classroom when they have their next capital building project. Until then, Smith is resolved with making the best of this space. She identified that the "isolation" does have its advantages such as being able to "do her own thing" and be loud or play music. She is thrilled that the district is willing to support a 3D program and is willing to wait and work with what she has to help build a program. She remarked, "Everything is kind of new, so they are trying to make it fit. I am so willing to roll with it. It is what it is, yah know. Could it be better? Absolutely." She described the process of working with the space she has stating, "But I feel like…non-stop… I just watch how they (students) move around the room. I have tables that move. Like today I spent some time setting up new stations and if it is not being used, it has got to go because there is no room for it. So, I just spend a lot more time condensing and moving things. Which is new."

The district bought four ceramic wheels and a kiln to get the program going. The kiln, however, is located next door on the second floor of the main building. When you enter Smith's classroom there is a large window across the front facing wall towards the high school and another at the opposite end of the classroom, behind Ms. Smith's desk area. The space is long and narrow with high-top tables and stools. The high-top tables have storage lockers underneath where students can store small projects. There is limited additional shelving and storage along the walls, and the single double tub sink is in a small room off the main space, out of view from the classroom. Along the left wall Smith has placed the four ceramic wheels. Boxes of clay are piled up along the wall near the entrance to the sink area. She described the storage as "Terrible. (laughs) I mean it is pretty terrible, but I am making the best with it. I am like bare bones. If I don't need it, I get it out." She noted, everything must have a place. The classroom has an interior door attaching it to the shop classroom. A shared printer is in Ms. Smith's room so

occasionally the shop teacher or his students come through to collect their copies. Despite its limitations, Smith described the room as "really magical" and a "fabulous little space" and is content with "fixing it" to meet her and her students' needs. For her next project she is planning on making giant papier Mache masks. She laughed when she stated she doesn't know where she is going to store them.

One drawback of being in an outbuilding is the commute across the driveway and parking area in bad weather. Smith lamented that some kids have dropped her class because they do not want to have to go outside to get to the classroom. Smith described forcing herself to go over to the main building in the morning just to feel a part of the school community and be visible. "In the morning, I force myself to go over and try to walk a lap around the building just to like see kids and to move my body. And I try to do a lap when they are coming off the bus, before the bell rings, I'll go in and grab something from the printer or fill up my water bottle just to show myself."

Scheduling

This is Ms. Smith's first year as a full-time art teacher at South Jr/Sr High School. Last year she was a part-time teacher teaching seventh and eighth grade art. The seventh and eighth grade students cycle through three six-week marking periods. The ceramics and sculpture classes are sequential full-year courses. She described how few projects she can get done with the seventh and eighth grade classes since she only sees them a quarter of the year. Smith hopes that as the seventh and eighth graders get to know her, she will be able to encourage them to take more of her art classes and help increase her course enrollment. Currently her class sizes range from two students to eighteen students per course and she noted that the numbers are not balanced across courses.

The district would like her to eventually teach Advanced Placement (AP) courses in 3D Art and had included an AP course in her schedule this fall, but no students were enrolled in it. This led to her having to recruit students for another section of ceramics to compensate for the gap in her schedule. She described going into study halls and encouraging students to sign up for her course. She anticipates that down the road the department will have to be proactive in the scheduling process to ensure students are aware of course opportunities. Until this year, there had only been one art teacher in the Jr/Sr high school, and they are still "figuring it out." She noted that there is an English teacher who teaches two sections of video production and that they once had a photography course, but it is no longer offered and that these courses could also come into play in future scheduling.

Smith is willing to work with the district to create an effective program and understands the "mindset" of the district wanting to offer their students AP courses. "I feel like with people I meet, and whatever, life interactions, I am always willing to jump in and lend a helping hand. That personality trait is from being from this school district, you know, like, you learn that." She continued, "Yeah, in education I have always been, 'yeah, give me that kid I'll take him.' When I

taught AP, I had students who never took a class with me but did something at home and they scored like 4's. And I am like, okay and some kids, that did terrible, but it was like the experience." She continued, "I'll always take a kid, you know, my door is always open. Not everyone feels that way. Not everyone is in the same boat. Or like in the middle of the semester, I have a new kid starting tomorrow. I'm like, well, get him in quick because we are starting a new project."

Budget

Since this is Ms. Smith's first year as a full-time art teacher in this district, she is still navigating the budgeting process. The district has made a commitment to developing a 3D, ceramics and sculpture program and has shown this commitment by buying a kiln, ceramic wheels, clay, and glazes. Smith came from a very large program where she was able to order materials throughout the year as needed and students paid a course fee which helped cover consumables. She expressed concern about managing reclaimed clay and learning how to control how much clay students are using. She noted, "I have never put a limit on clay with students. I (may) have to do that. I had those conversations at the conference with singleton teachers where, little districts, maybe they only did one or two projects or whatever."

Access

When asked, Ms. Smith said the students are starting to get to know her and some students have visited her classroom outside of their class times. "Some yes, I feel it is growing. I haven't been here long enough. But I feel like, yes, you know they just have to get to know me to feel a connection." When asked if teachers have visited her classroom she stated, "No, unless, if they need something, usually, but no. And I think only three teachers have been out here. You know, they have no idea what is happening." She noted that unless the students have a class with her, they do not know that she is there. She even described telling the classroom teachers to show (out the window) where her classroom door is, so students know where to go.

Because Ms. Smith's room is isolated from the main campus building, she has limited access to the rest of the faculty and staff. She noted, "Singleton and being in this little building, I do not collaborate that much. Um, I share a wall with one teacher, and we'll talk, we say hi in the morning and sometimes one of us will have an issue and be like, I have to talk through something. That's been really nice. But this little building, I wish I could stand in the hall more and just like, I need adult interaction, you know."

Curriculum

There were no materials or curriculum materials provided when Ms. Smith began teaching the seventh and eighth grade art courses last year. She was hired to teach part-time a month into the school year and "hit the ground running" and was able to prove herself capable of developing art lessons and managing a middle school classroom. Smith stated, "I became a first-year teacher all over again. So that was a new experience for me. The demographics are very

different. And so, yeah, I have done a lot of reflection on my units, of like, okay, I need to change this, or I need to speed it up or I don't need to go in depth here." Smith indicated there has been limited interactions with the other art teachers in the district regarding curriculum matters. She reflected upon initiating a conversation with the Pre-K through 5th grade art teacher to see what skills she could expect students coming into seventh and eighth grade art to have to inform her curriculum planning for her seventh and eighth graders. She remembered, "A big revelation I had at the beginning of the summer was that I have never worked where I knew who the elementary school teacher is. And I was able…I reached out to Melissa over the summertime, and I was like, hi, you are actually who I need to be talking to, what will the students know when they come into (my class) what I need to be repeating?"

The district requires monthly department meetings; however, Smith described these meetings as a time to cover business type information that could be "communicated in an email" and not a time for curriculum work or collegiate conversations. She misses the authentic check-ins she experienced at her previous district the "what are you doing", "how is it going" kind of conversations. "But it doesn't mean it won't be in time. I just don't think there has been that experience. You know, I am coming from having that experience a lot! I am itching for it." She continued, "Yeah, no, there is not time for it, it is not built it. We meet once a month, but we don't collaborate. We don't even check in. It is like a here is what you need to know…is everyone ready for the art show?"

Since Ms. Smith is creating a new 3D program, and the courses are specifically her area of expertise, much of the curriculum work falls into her hands. She indicated that to gain understanding for N.Y.S. Arts Standards and get support for curriculum development she enrolled in any professional development offerings she could "get my hands on." She participated in several BOCES sponsored PD workshops, a couple of which the other high school art teacher attended with her. This allowed for time "outside of school" for these colleagues to share in PD offerings and collaborate in this capacity. When asked about taking the time away from her classroom to go to PD offerings Smith indicated that earlier in her career she would not have felt as comfortable with doing something like that. "Earlier in my career I would not have done that at all. There are just different things that I find more beneficial for the longevity of my career. And the kids are okay." I just have to be really strategic in making sure I've got them, if I am going to be gone, they are going to be self-sufficient. You know." Smith described professional development with colleagues as "it really feeds my soul." "I think it is so important. Putting the work in of writing lesson plans and stuff like that. I'll do it. I know not many people feel that way. There are a lot of people that … and like Friday is the end of our marking period, but for me I value it so much that… it doesn't matter."

Smith continued, "I have learned that I get more out of those PD days. Not only like, mentally, doing something different, but the amount that happens in one day in the classroom is not going to make or break what is going on. But it has taken me a long time to be like yeah, I am going to take a day to go do PD. Because collaborating and getting to do all of those things is

so beneficial. Just to get away and come back with fresh eyes, so like, 'oh, let's try this'. It's like a fresh breath of air."

Ms. Smith's previous district would use superintendent days as professional development days. Smith described 150 art teachers from schools across the district coming together in workshops. She misses having that feeling of community among arts colleagues. Even if they did not teach the same content, Smith valued the conversations and exchange of ideas experienced during these encounters.

School and Community Support

When discussing support from teaching colleagues, Smith shared an example of being left out of a support program for the seventh and eighth grade students. The program is called WIN (What I Need). This program allows for an open period where teachers can work individually with seventh and eighth grade students on incomplete work or reteaching. Although Smith teaches these grade levels and has students who need extra time for art lessons, the WIN time is scheduled during times when she is teaching other classes. Additionally, when planning the schedule, they did not even consider art content time. "…And I sat in a room where they put the four content areas up there (not including art) and they were like, okay, on Mondays you get these kids and on Tuesdays you get these kids, and I need to be up there, but like, kids need access to my studio. This is probably a harder class for them to make up. And so that was like, 'wait, wait, wait, I need to be on there too!' And they were like, oh, we'll just placate her. I absolutely felt that way for sure. Okay, I'll figure out how to navigate that one."

Smith also described instances where students missed time in her class due to being pulled for other things. She described needing to "tread lightly" since she is a new teacher and is not familiar with how things work in the district. "But I have had those conversations before in the past. Where counselors and staff would always pull kids from my class. It is actually easier if you take them from an English class, they can go and read at night or they can still get that done. They can't throw on the wheel at home… So yeah, that's a hard one. But yeah, I have felt like I kind of had to shift my… practice or train of thought with that too just to meet what has been normally expected here."

Overall, Smith described a bit of a different feeling of value for the art learning than she has experienced in the past. She does attribute a bit of that feeling to potentially her being new to the district. She stated, "I do feel like more, more than I have experienced before, that 'art teacher' isn't – I don't want to say valued – but it is valued. Like, it seems a little different here when I am talking with other teachers. But also, they don't know me, and they don't know my history, of like, so maybe, it's just more conversations have to happen in this place."

Smith described the school and community as supportive of the arts. She identified that the district has made a strong commitment to creating a 3D arts program and just by hiring her and providing materials she feels supported in her position. Additionally, the district has been

supportive of her participating in several PD training workshops this year. She remarked, "The fact that they fought for me to go from part time to full time, I have to say, yes, absolutely I am supported here. But I am still figuring out what that actually means, you know." When it comes to interactions with administrators she stated "I feel supported, I feel like I am seen when I need to be. Being able to pop in and have a conversation rather than having to be put on someone's calendar for like a month out, it is really nice."

Smith continued, "I feel very supported here. I have not had any issues. I'm told that if I want to go to professional development I can go, just sign up. I did not expect that coming into a little district. So, I feel very privileged. I've also not heard that from other teachers who I've met. Like at the PD, they have had to fight to get to choose just one. So, I am like wow. I really have it awesome, so I am very thankful that that is how it is."

When describing community support Smith noted that she is new to the community, and she is navigating a means to communicate with community members. She remarked that it is different than her previous school where there was a local coffee shop and places like that to support and display student work. She also noted that she has had a few parents offer to supply materials and have asked what she needs.

Student Art Opportunities Outside of School

Smith is unfamiliar with what art opportunities there are for students in her district outside of school. She can tell that some of her students do come to her with art skills indicating arts learning perhaps out of school. "There are some kids, yes, you can tell that they have those experiences. Then there are some that don't, and there are some that come in here like craving art."

Smith also noted the difference in opportunity for arts experiences between rural students and students living in urban areas. "I feel when I lived in a city the kids would go to the art museum on their free time and ride the tram downtown." Smith, however, was not certain if even though urban students had this opportunity, the numbers of students who took advantage of it was significant.

She did indicate that the district has been very supportive of taking students on field trips. "They are really supportive here at school, they're like 'If you have a field trip you want to go on and you can go.' Just, you know, hit all the projected requirements…" She described the difference between having to travel for field trips and living with access to an urban center. "It was not like what it is here, where you have to get a bus and go away for like an hour just to get there."

Personal Artmaking

Although Smith has a full studio in her home, she confessed she has only been in it twice in the past year. Between her classroom responsibilities and "all my other hobbies" her personal

art making has been "pushed aside." She commented, "A reflection I am sitting with right now is, like, actively making alongside of the kids. And that has been a reflection of mine as a teacher. I just haven't had the time to do it, but I feel like I have more time now than I have ever had in my career, but I still don't find time to do it." Smith added that she and her husband both are active learners and often have many projects going at once.

Challenges

Ms. Smith describes technology as one of her biggest challenges in the classroom. With the way the art world changes, and new technologies emerge, she identified her anxiety with keeping up. She confided, "I stay with what I am comfortable with because I do not have somebody to push me. Like 3D printing. That is something I should be doing. You know that is something I should be working through with my students, especially in a sculpture class. We should have a project for that." She described how despite the internet and other resources for learning about new technologies, it is difficult to find the time and motivation to take on something more. She wishes that there were professional development workshops offered specifically for teachers to learn new technologies in an efficient and practical manner. She commented, "I have been to so many conferences with single lessons where that was fun for my personal growth but I'm not going to do that in the classroom right. If there were like courses, consecutive courses, or something, where I could learn confidently like digital photography or lightroom and do like units in it." She continued,

> At a small school to be able to have those options would be so beneficial for the students. But, because that is not my comfort zone, and no one is pushing me out of it, I'm gonna tread lightly. You know, I'm gonna, ah, if the opportunity was there, sure! If it was guaranteed that I could come out confidently and have resources to go back to ask questions and not feel like I'm taking away from someone who already has a million things going on. So, like an evening class offered through BOCES – I'd be like, yeah!

Skills for Success

When asked what skills help her to be successful, Smith responded "confidence in what I am doing." She stated, "But that also comes with experience, you know, I was not confident at first. It took however many years of teaching and reflection and experience to get to that point." Continuing her reflection of where she is in her teaching career, Smith noted that she doesn't think she would be as confident in her tenth year of teaching without her experiences at her previous school district. She attributes her growth as an educator to the team of teachers she worked with. She had "rock stars" to inspire and mentor her. Smith shared, "Like, my very good friend, Justine, she didn't work with me originally, she worked at East High School, which was an even bigger more affluent school in our district. And she worked in this team that they all worked for Art in Ed through the university, and I would see them all at the conferences and I would be like… they're the rock stars…they are doing everything, they are presenting at NAEA." Smith described how her friend helped her identify her strengths and encouraged her to

present at CAEA (Colorado Art Education Association). "And she (her friend) was like, 'Hey, Smith, you're a bad ass. Go present at CAEA.' I was like hah, you think I can present at CAEA? And then, I went and did it, and I was okay. You know there is nothing to it, but I remember those big feelings. All those balloons of big feelings were popped by having rock stars in my life." Smith realized how important these experiences were to her career path. She reflected, "Yeah, I have never talked through this. But, like yeah, if I had started and only done my career here, I would not be who I am today. Absolutely not, no way. Um, I don't even know if I would still be in education. It would have eaten me alive."

Some other skills Smith identified that help her be successful are organizational skills, an ability to self-advocate, curiosity, and a willingness to seek out information and learning, her outgoing nature, open mindedness, and a willingness to take risks, and be self-reflective.

Advantages of a Small District

When asked about the advantages of teaching in a small district Smith identified the ability to foster relationships with the students. Smith commented, "I'm really looking forward to five years down the road. The families know me as Mrs. Smith or … the siblings get to say, 'You're going to take ceramics with Mrs. Smith!' Right. Nobody really knows me yet, but they will." She looks forward to setting up routines to develop relationships with the students and their families. She commented on how she did not have that experience in her previous district. Here, she commented, "You get to know them. For good or for bad but I think that it's an advantage for the arts. Especially if you start to set up those annual traditions."

Characteristics

When asked to describe what it means to be a singleton Smith responded, "I'm a singleton, as I'm the only one that teaches the seventh and eighth grade art, and the ceramics and sculpture courses, so being able to collaborate with someone on that content specific. It's a lot different than collaborating on someone under an umbrella of just saying, I'm an art teacher, right, and like I can learn certain things from them, but it's not exactly what I teach." She continued by describing how singletons need to be self-advocates, "You know, I think a lot of it is you're like you're teaching people what you do. You kind of have to learn to advocate for yourself and your content in that way."

Ms. Smith described herself as a singleton teacher even when she was teaching in her previous school district. Even though there were four other art teachers in her previous school, she was the only 3D art teacher. So, when it came to daily support for content specific information and collaboration, she was a singleton. She reflected,

Um, so as a reflection of what it is as a singleton, I'm alone." She continued, "But um, I guess it, the feeling of isolation and (pause) and maybe a little bit of self-doubt, too. 'I don't know, is that working?' I don't know, as teachers we spend so much time reflecting on what we do. 'Did I say something wrong?', you know, 'is

the way I am explaining it not working?' You know, it is just the collaboration piece is key for all educators but in the arts, it is so much harder, because each class is different. Like the eighth-grade English teachers can go and dissect their rubrics and see how's that working, its different. So, I think as a singleton I am always looking for ways to try and connect to other people. Do you know my language? Do you understand me?

Smith described how things have changed in the past few years for her, since COVID. She remembered, "I am trying to think exactly how far, well maybe right around COVID times all of these Facebook teacher groups came about, and I really started to tap into those, and I have found it so beneficial. Because I have been able to post question or is someone post a question, I find myself reading through all of their comments and I feel like I learn a lot from that." She continued, "I don't know the best way to do things. I know how to do it my way, but I'm, well maybe it's only my personality, but I'm always looking to see how other people do it or 'what is something that you've tried, what worked, what didn't work.' Even what worked for one year teaching, might not work for the next, depending upon the students."

Smith commented "I feel like you have to do a lot more self-advocating. But I feel like you have to do that regardless as an educator. Things are changing so fast." and "I don't know how much of my *singleton-ness* makes me feel different than others."

Smith described how singleton-ness for her comes with a degree of autonomy. "I feel like it's nice. Because it's, you know, you can kind of make your own world. And I feel like the standards are open ended enough that you can, you know, kind of create your own content." She described how this freedom can be both good and bad. "Well, for some people, it's a good thing. For others, it's a bad thing. But you don't always have someone checking in on you, because you're the only person doing what you do." She continued to describe how being confident in her abilities has helped her to navigate being a singleton. "I can't imagine if I wasn't confident in what I was doing, how much I would second guess what I was doing, you know, as a singleton, or like, being worried of having like a false reality, like, am I teaching the right thing? Or, you know, am I doing this right? Is that the right way to teach it?" She identified confidence and content knowledge as being very important characteristics of being a quality singleton art teacher. She also described outgoingness as an important characteristic for being a successful singleton teacher. "I also feel like you have to be outgoing, just so you can make connections."

Smith described the difficulty in getting to know the local art educator network and how that plays into the characteristics of her singleton experience. "I just know that I need to be part of the bigger network, in an area like that, and like how to get in, and it's so intimidating, because you have, it's just like meeting new friends or making new friends, right? Like, you have to show up multiple times before you, like, recognize faces, or have those interactions and get to know people and have authentic laughs together, and then you can start to collaborate." She identified time, or lack of "enough time", as a factor in making these connections. She also described the amount of time necessary to develop curriculum when you are a singleton and how useful it

would be to collaborate with others teaching her content and to share experiences. She identified that singleton content specialists do not have the advantage of gaining knowledge from a team of teachers working together to explore and develop curriculum.

When asked about characteristics of singleton-ness in relation to her experiences with developing professional and social relationships with her district colleagues, Smith stated,

> Well, there's so much to do all the time. Like, I work through my lunch. Like, I don't eat lunch in the staff room. You know, I don't even know if they do, because I've never been over there during lunch period; actually. So, I'm super isolated, but there's so much to do to manage an arts classroom, it's not only curriculum, but it's movement around the space, its stations, it's materials, and it's supplies. And that all has to get done, you know, when you teach five different, like, crazy hands-on courses. You know, it takes a lot of time to have all those stations set up and it, you know, run smoothly. So, I don't have time to go out and socialize. And yeah, I don't know anyone. Like, it's too hard. And I don't know, I don't know if that's particular to being a singleton teacher. I think that's just being an art teacher. And it's like one of those things that always gets overlooked, right, like, we're the ones that do the job of a million things, art shows, display cases, all the things.

Wants

When asked what professional development programming Smith would like to have to support her specific needs as a singleton rural art teacher, she first identified content specific collaboration and training. "Like, if I want to collaborate with other ceramic teachers, I want to collaborate with ceramics teachers, not drawing and painting teachers, but so many singletons and teachers are the ceramics and drawing and whatever, teachers you know." She continued, "So if I could pass on, you know, to someone who if that if that's what they're doing for their living, like figuring out a way to break up the day when we are together, where we can just talk about that, that specific content for even if it's a certain amount of time, maybe it's not the entire time, but like, we're the ceramics teachers, this is your time where you're talking about ceramics, or this is the time that you're talking about seventh grade art projects, or, you know, like, being able to just hone in on a specific area." She also described having regularly scheduled, once or twice a month, opportunities to work with other art educators on curriculum such as rubrics and developing curriculum for the Arts Pathway. She described how having regular meetings would help to foster a community of arts educators who could work together and support one another. "You know, it should be, like, once a month, because that's also again, face time, that's how you get to know people, and then, you know, you're more likely to reach out to someone via text, if you have questions or concerns, if you like, have somewhat of a friendship, you know, …facilitating some type of social aspect too."

Smith also identified a need for opportunities to learn more about the resources available to art teachers, such as the Arts in Education program. She suggested a catalog to help teachers know what programs and professional artists are available to facilitate programming for students. She mentioned specifically the Artist as Teachers program and how she would love to regularly

have artists visit her classroom and teach her and her students' new techniques and art forms. She also described opportunities to attend workshops that are specifically designed with mediums and curriculum building in mind. She commented, "The more teachers get to, like, tinker and play artistically. It opens up our horizons, you know, or guided by someone else where you're like, oh, that's outside of my wheelhouse, could I use you as a reference and bring that back to my room?"

Smith described the need for interaction with other arts colleagues both in district and out of district. She commented, "It would be nice to have some feedback or time to talk through things or do some cognitive coaching with people." To provide for her own needs, Smith has participated in several professional development workshops both as an organizer and presenter at her previous district and now as a new teacher in the CNY community. She noted, "I just want to know who is out there. Who can I lean on? I want to know, does this already exist and how do I get involved?" Despite her efforts, Smith noted that the PD offered through the local BOCES can be a bit confusing. There is a CITI BOCES and an OCM BOCES. She has attended PD offered by both and was confused as to why there were two, which one she should attend, and what is the best use of her time. She remarked after describing the PD she has attended "… I just want to know everything, because I want to know how it works, so I know what is the best use of my time."

When describing her needs and desires as a singleton teacher, Smith shared this experience, "I went to the CITI BOCES one (PD workshop) last Friday and they had a round table for HS Art teachers. Everyone went around and told what they teach. And everyone is teaching everything. The conversation there was it would be nice to sit with a content teacher. Even for me, I would like to sit, my passion is ceramics, right, I'd love to sit with ceramics teachers to see what they are doing around here." Smith goes on to describe her PD experiences at her previous school district where the 3D teachers were grouped together. She noted "I've sat in those groups in Denver and on our PD days we'd have the 3D teachers sit together and I felt like I never really got much out of it because I guess whatever was working or the population of my school didn't relate to the content. I felt like a lot of the singleton teachers who didn't have another art teacher in the building always came to me and they were like 'tell me more, how do you do that' you know organizational skills and clean up, it's like if you are not actively trying to find that information then, maybe I'm a rarity in that but you know I have had a lot of teachers come to me like 'oh, that's brilliant'."

Summary

Smith's arts-filled childhood, life experience, and willingness to take on challenges led her back to the rural community in which she grew up to develop a 3D visual arts program at South Jr/Sr High School. After exploring her interests and traveling, she chose to pursue a degree in art education and began her career teaching at a large urban district where she was the only 3D arts specialist in her building. After eight years at Denver Public School, Smith and her family

moved back to Central N.Y. where Smith and her husband were raised. Smith accepted a position at the high school she attended as a teen and is now using her talents to navigate the challenges of being a singleton teacher and new member of the arts community.

Smith attributes her outgoingness, content knowledge, and willingness to jump in and take on new challenges with her ability to navigate her new position developing a 3D visual arts program at South Jr/Sr High School. Although Smith's classroom is in an outbuilding separate from the main campus building, she embraces the space as a starting point to build upon. Even with its limitations, she described the space as "magical" and is committed to encouraging students to seek out the opportunities 3D artmaking has to offer.

Although Smith had two other art teacher colleagues in the district, she is the only 3D arts specialist, and both of her colleagues teach in separate buildings. Smith identified herself as a singleton both at DPS and now at South Jr/Sr High School. In both experiences Smith described instances of isolation when it came to content support and professional development. DPS provided in-house professional development to its visual arts faculty creating a district network of educators. Despite this network, Smith still identified a lack of content specific professional development opportunities. In Denver she was able to make connections to the local arts organizations and even served as a presenter at arts workshops and conferences. Now that she is in a new state and teaching in a new position, she has been fervently seeking out art professional development in search of a local art educator network.

Smith identified a connection to other arts educators and professional development as both an opportunity to seek tools to develop her program and an opportunity to develop a network for personal and professional support for her teaching. She described these encounters as "it really feeds my soul" and she accredited it with promoting longevity in her career. Although her experiences so far with the local BOCES and CITI BOCES professional development offerings has been confusing due to recent changes in leadership, she is hopeful that these organizations will provide the resources and arts network she needs in the future.

Additionally, Smith described instances of isolation due to her classroom location and availability of time to interact with the other educators in her district. She attributed time, location, and colleague knowledge of her content specialty as hinderances to her opportunity to develop professional relationships within her district. Despite these challenges she maintained a positive outlook for these opportunities in the future and looks forward to when students, families, and colleagues "know her name" and look forward to the "traditions" she creates with her program.

Smiths identified the duplicity of autonomy. On the one hand it is wonderful to be able to explore lesson ideas and develop one's own curriculum, but on the other hand it is a large task to manage as a singleton. Smith looks forward to developing a network of arts educators to share ideas with and collaborate with to develop content specific curriculum and programming. She attributed her outgoing personality, organization, natural curiosity, and willingness to try new

things with her ability to thrive as a singleton arts educator. She identified that outgoingness and confidence are both significant characteristics she identifies with success in the singleton arts classroom.

When asked what professional development support she would ask for, she described opportunities to bring in Artists as Teachers to her classroom to help enhance her knowledge base and provide enriched experiences for her students. She also suggested workshops to teach content specific skills and develop lessons and units that could be brought back to the classroom. She also requested opportunities to meet regularly with like content arts educators to develop a network of peers that could be an easily accessible resource for information and support. Finally, she stressed the importance of face time with colleagues to develop relationships and community.

Marie's Story ~ Cowtown Elementary School

Teacher Background Demographics

Marie (pseudonym) has been teaching art in public school for thirty-two years. She has taught at Cowtown Elementary School for her entire teaching career. She began teaching art in a BOCES (Board of Cooperative Educational Services) appointed position that was shared between Cowtown and another neighboring district. Each half-time position was in a rural elementary school. After two years she accepted a full-time position at Cowtown teaching kindergarten through second grade art and gifted and talented; an enrichment program for advanced students across disciplines. Cowtown Elementary School serves 366 students, Pre-k through sixth grade (data.nysed.gov) and is in a rural farming community approximately eighteen miles south of an urban center populated by 150,000 people (Census.gov). Marie is responsible for the visual arts instruction for all grade levels Pre-K through 6. In the district there are three art teachers. Marie teaches as a singleton in the elementary school building and the other two art teachers teach in the Jr/Sr high school building located on the same campus, separated by an athletic field.

Marie grew up in a rural community like Cowtown. When asked to describe her community she answered, "So, it is actually very similar to Cowtown. It was very rural. I would say a little bit bigger than Cowtown, but as far as distances between houses and things like that it was very rural, farms, a lot of farms." The school district she attended had approximately 1000 students total compared to Cowtown's 700 students (data.nysed.gov). Marie described how her interests in art was supported and fostered by her parents and grandmothers, she stated, "Yes, my parents were very supportive. I think at the time there weren't a lot of classes you could take or camps. But, um, they got me materials to use. I was like the artsy one in the family so any time anyone had like a poster to make or something I would help out with that…so… both grandmothers were very artistic, one was a painter, and one did ceramics, so I was always around people doing art."

Both of Marie's parents were high school science teachers, and she described her grandmother as being a large influence in her understanding of what it was like to be an art teacher. "…as far as the teaching part goes, probably, the biggest influence would be my grandmother who taught kindergarten/pre-school her whole life. And, I remember going over and helping her, you know, getting things ready for her classes… they did a ton of things with the little kids, and I remember her doing different projects with them, so when I thought of teaching art, I thought, like yeah, I could do that," commented Marie.

Marie described being an art minded student in a small district. "So, high school was very similar to Cowtown, so there were some art courses offered. I would say I got to take photography, drawing and painting…I don't think I did ceramics in high school. I don't think they had it." She continued, "…it was a little district, so I think they didn't have as much to offer

but the courses I did take I enjoyed, and I knew that I wanted to continue doing art somehow."
Marie did continue with her art interests as an art major in college, and in her junior year her
advisor suggested she pursue a future in art education. She was able to turn her art training into a
teaching degree, she stated, "I was able to kinda put it together, between an art major and
education minor, I was able to get certified in art education. What was interesting was I have
never taken any art education courses because of that. Kinda making up my own major. That
definitely doesn't fly any more (laughs)." When asked about her teacher preparation program
Marie described that she didn't take any art education courses. She described her student
teaching as being most beneficial when it came to her art teaching learning, she noted, "I really
didn't take art education courses in teaching in college." As far as student teaching, Marie
reflected, "…I did primary, kindergarten through fourth grade and then I did middle school, but
never had any experience with high school." She continued, "I had two really good host teachers.
They were very different from each other, but they were really good as far as like classroom
management styles, just organizing art materials, organizing projects and lessons, so that was
super-duper helpful." Her student teaching experience also solidified her preference for teaching
elementary aged students, she noted, "…I think that helped, at least, ensured that I prefer
teaching the little kids."

After passing her certification exams and earning her art teaching degree, Marie sent out
applications to districts across New York State. At the time, there were very few art teaching
positions available. After accepting the part-time shared teaching position at Cowtown, she
moved to the Central New York area and completed her master's degree in reading at a local
State University. Marie remarked, "So, for a masters, I did a masters in reading because at the
time the word was that you should get certified in as many things as you can get certified in.
Because, in case, they cut positions, you could be certified in something else. So, I chose to get it
in reading, to be certified in reading, so I am a certified reading teacher."

Looking back Marie confessed that at the time, since art teaching jobs were so scarce, she
would have taken any available art position but was glad that her journey had led her to a small
rural community like where she grew up. She remarked, "Well, I hate to say that I probably
would have taken anything, but it did work out because Cowtown is very similar to the district I
grew up in. It was a rural, small community, um, so I was kinda familiar with that. I think I could
have ended up in more of a city school, but I don't know if I would have liked it as much."

Teaching Environment

Cowtown Elementary School is in the town center of a small rural community. The
district serves 700 students (data.nysed.gov) and has two buildings on campus. One, being the
elementary building where Marie teaches, and the other being a Jr/Sr high school building
located an athletic field's walking distance from the elementary building. Both buildings are on
the same side of the road and connected by a driveway and sidewalks. According to census data,

the district is identified as Rural (42) Distant with a community population of 6,005 +/- 241 residents (Census.gov). Marie's commute to work takes approximately 20-25 minutes.

Marie's classroom has been in different locations throughout her career at Cowtown. Currently, her classroom is in the western wing of the building in a connecting corridor between the two sections of the structure. She does not have classrooms on either side of her room and is located across from the teacher's room. The adjacent hallway leads in one direction to the Pre-k classrooms and in the other direction to the first and second grade wing beyond a playroom area and bathroom facility. On the east side of her room is a breezeway which connects her classroom to the other portions of the building where the additional grade levels are housed along with the school and district offices, auditorium, gym, and cafeteria. Marie describes this space as being more isolated than previous locations. She stated, "The school is quite spread out. Pre-k, first and second grade are down this wing and third and fourth grade are in the other wing down there with the fifth and sixth grade upstairs. The fifth and sixth graders come on their own. They don't get walked down so that can be a bit tricky because they have kind of a long way to travel and there are stairs involved so sometimes that can be a little tricky, keeping themselves under control (laughs)." Marie described advantages and disadvantages of being more isolated, she noted,

> Yes, it was a busier location with the older kids upstairs. Um, I kinda felt a little more in the mix upstairs. However, I kinda like that down here is out of the mix because I feel like I can keep my door open, you know, we are not being too loud and disturbing to the other classes. There are pros and cons for both areas. The room upstairs was a better art room, better space, bigger, more storage.

Even though the teacher's room is located across the hall, Marie commented that she has little time to "hang out" or chat with teachers who come to the teacher's room. Additionally commenting that her interactions with teachers are mostly when they are dropping off students for her class. She stated, "Mostly it's because the classroom teachers bring their kids to art and pick them up so that is how I end up seeing people. Maybe chat a little bit about kids in between if there were any issues or something." When asked to describe her current classroom's layout and functionality, she stated,

> Pretty good, so now, our school just went through a mini renovation, they didn't touch the art room. I did get new furniture, only after I asked for it. So, in that case I kinda feel like I was left out, a little bit. For the most part it works. It is not set up like an art room though, it is a classroom that has been turned into an art room. It works. I have been in other classrooms in the school, and they might have worked a little bit better as far as storage, sinks, stuff like that. But it is okay. It could be better. This space wasn't designed to be an art room and it doesn't sound like in any future renovations they plan to change it into an art room. I have storage in another room. I have ceramics in another room. That is not ideal, but it works. The kiln is in another room.

Marie's classroom has one closet with double doors that slide open horizontally and two other closets that are larger with shelved storage. There is only one sink and limited sink counter space. Younger students must use a stool to reach the faucet. The opposite wall has a long row of windows with a counter in front of it and open shelving underneath where she keeps cardboard trays with students' work identified by class. The classroom has two white board areas and a large smartboard. Recently, Marie's tables were replaced to allow for two to three students at each table. The seating areas are designated by color. There is a half-circle table in the corner where students can gather around as she demonstrates art techniques and lesson procedures. Marie makes the most of her classroom layout but admits that she must plan out when she is doing 3D projects to have enough storage space. She stated, "I have another room down the hall where the kiln is, so for clay pieces I quickly get them out of this room and put them in the kiln room, so they don't get touched and broken, so there is room down there. But yeah, I can't do too many 3D projects at the same time. So, one grade level at a time for sure. Yeah, but it works out okay."

Materials such as pencils, markers, paper, etc., that students regularly use, are stored where students can access them independently. In the corner by the door there are extension materials such as coloring worksheets, books, blocks, and playdough students can access when they have finished their work. The hallway allows room for Marie to display 3D student work on a table and a place for classes to line up and wait for their class to begin. There are also bulletin boards and wall space throughout the building and in the district office for artwork display.

Schedule/Access

Marie described scheduling class times as being an ongoing challenge for administration. In the time she has been teaching at Cowtown there have been many changes to the schedule. At first Marie was one of two teachers teaching art. She taught the primary grades kindergarten through second grade and the other teacher taught third grade through sixth grade. When the other teacher retired another art teacher was hired, with the district continuing to support two art teachers in the elementary school. Later, one of the art teachers was moved to the Jr/Sr high school and a .8 part-time art teacher was hired to teach along with Marie in the elementary school. Both teachers taught kindergarten through sixth grade, sharing sections of students in each grade level according to how the schedule allowed. After the first year the .8 position was changed to a full-time position with the second art teacher teaching .5 Art and .5 Gifted and Talented.

Marie described her early years teaching with one other "mentor" teacher, she stated,

At first, the first art teacher I worked with, we really didn't do anything together because we had different grade levels. But she still was there as a person to ask a question like, 'how do you think this is going to work?' We shared materials all

the time, because at that point, I was half-time, and I didn't have a lot of art materials. I didn't have a closet (of materials) built up yet. So, in that fact it was great to have an art teacher next door to say 'Hey, do you have scratch art pens I can borrow for this lesson?' … Now if I don't have something, I don't have it, yah know. (laughs). So, that was nice. Having materials shared, ideas shared, even if we weren't doing the same thing.

Later when Marie worked with another art teacher teaching the same grade levels, she described the advantages of being able to discuss lessons and share ideas. She explained, "So, say when we were doing a lesson that did cross over to other classes it was a pretty shared thing, like, you come up with an idea for this one, you come up with an idea…it was back and forth. But again, it was probably the personalities too. Depending upon who you are working with…I always felt it was pretty easy to work with another person."

It has been many years since Marie had another art teacher to work with in the elementary school. The program was cut back leaving one teacher to teach all the students, kindergarten through sixth grade. At that time the program was cut from students having art instruction once every three days to once every six days. This was a significant change in the program and Marie's responsibilities as now the lone art teacher. Marie described scheduling as "complicated" and notes that it changes every year. She described it as follows, "I think, over the years we have lost some time. You know, one year they cut to a forty-minute class, it used to be forty-five-minute classes. I'm trying to think, I think it used to be every class met every three days. So, then it went to a four-day schedule and now some are to a six-day schedule. So now, we're kinda losing time with them." She continued by describing how the change in class time affected her workload and curriculum,

> Yeah, it(changes) cut back on teachers, and it cut back on time. I wasn't seeing the kids as much, which was tricky because the lesson I had been doing I had set up for it is going to take x-amount of days. When it dropped back, you know, that affects your whole curriculum. How much you can get done in a year and get to these projects. So, yes, that happened at the same time. Not only was it just me doing it but it was also a little harder to get things done because of less time with the kids. So, less time, so that for sure was going to affect growth. You see it in the lessons I could do with them. I couldn't do projects that were going to last weeks because we'd only get four done. So, I had to invent new projects or a new way of doing the projects so we could get them in. Um, so yeah, the time difference for sure affected the kids' growth because they were definitely getting less art.

This year, students in grades K-6 meet for 40 minutes and the pre-kindergarten students meet for 30 minutes. Kindergarten, second grade, fourth grade, fifth grade and sixth grade meet every four days and first and third grade meet every three days. Some days Marie has seven grade levels in one day. Additionally, this year one of the Jr/Sr high art teachers must travel to the elementary school to teach a section of sixth grade art every other day so Marie can have her contracted prep time. Marie described how this schedule would be difficult for a novice teacher,

I think, luckily for me. Once I became the sole art teacher, I already had experience. It was very helpful when I first started teaching to have someone else there. An experienced person to ask questions to, a mentor, just even for procedures and things like that. Of course, everybody kinda does their own thing… but just to, you know, when you are brand new starting out, it is overwhelming the whole, you know, everything about school. Um, so, I think it was okay because I had kinda established my own routines and my own stuff by the time I was the only one here but, you know, it is always good to have somebody else to talk to about things and just… their expertise in different areas.

Marie has a very busy schedule with very little time between classes to prepare for the next lesson. She described how she has created routines with the students to help expedite transition time and make the most of their artmaking time. She stated,

I do have pretty strong routines just to make the most of the forty minutes. So, they come in. I will introduce the lesson. I use the big TV. I will often bring them over (to the table) to do (demonstrate) an example. I use a table that they gather around. And, then they have time to work, and I try to give them as much time as I can to work and break up the lesson enough that I am introducing only pieces of it, so I am not talking the whole time, so they have actual art time. And then, at five minutes left of class it is clean up time. I expect that they all help out, and they usually do… They are pretty good about that.

Budget

When asked if her budget was adequate for her needs for materials and supplies Marie responded, "Yes, it always has (been). I have always felt like it is very generous. This year we kinda cut back a little, it may just be a lean year for Cowtown. I'm not sure. I actually had to cut my budget back this year a little bit. Which I haven't in many, many years. So, yes, I would say yes, it is not like we are, you know, needing things but a little tighter this year. (laughs)."

Curriculum

As described earlier, Marie has adapted her lessons over the years to accommodate her changing schedule. When asked about curriculum support when the program was initially cut and she became the lone elementary art teacher, she indicated that she did not receive any district help with curriculum and was left on her own to make the appropriate adjustments. Marie commented, "I think I have gotten used to it as far as curriculum goes. I have, I know it is just me to rely on. Of course, I can reach out to the Jr/Sr high people, and it is sometimes kind of fun. We have done cross curricular kinds of things. We took the elementary art club kids to the high school, so that's fun but the football field separating us is a big football field and it is really very different between the two schools." Over the years there have been district-wide initiatives to develop curriculum that Marie has been a part of, she recalled, "They had, I don't even know what they were calling it at the time, I was on the Social Studies Group. But really, that was

driven by the classroom teachers. And it was helpful to me because I would know, like, oh, they're, they're studying this next month, I can tie that into something." She continued,

> I remember when Pre-K started, they actually had a schedule of the topics they were covering, which was great. Starting Pre-K, I had never taught Pre-K, I could link in and kind of, you know, do what they were doing, at least tie it in. But that doesn't happen all that much. There's been times where it's been better. And depending on the teachers, they'll share what they're doing. But I would say right now, there's not a lot of cross curricular stuff going on. Some of the teachers that have been doing it for years, we keep doing it, but I wouldn't say it's a lot. It comes and goes depending on the teachers, depending on the year, but they're busy too. And I get it. But you know, it was nice to know, like, here's your, you know, your curriculum for the year, at least the main topics, and I can tie in.

Typically, staff days are geared towards "classroom teacher things" not towards "special areas" content. Recently the district has started an initiative to clarify curricular standards and goals. Each content team is tasked with determining their priority standards, creating "I can" statements for their students, and aligning their lessons and assessments to these targeted standards. Marie has been working with the high school art teachers on this task. Although the art teachers work as a team, each teacher is responsible for the grade levels and courses they teach. Marie teaches seven grade levels. She is singularly responsible for determining the lessons and assessments to track each priority standard across grade levels Pre-K through sixth grade.

Marie described the difference she has noticed between being a singleton teacher and having other elementary art teachers to work with this way, "When I first started here, there were two art teachers here (at the elementary level) and then there was one. So, I really can tell the difference between having somebody to be supportive and together (with) and with curriculum, grading, even anything…bounce ideas… and then to have nobody to do that with. Its, its, I have had both so… even though I have only been at this district I have (noticed) there's a big difference." She continued, "…when it comes to actually teaching or standards, I have no one else to, you know, really say like, what do you think does this fit that? Or, you know, I have to kind of fly blind sometimes, as far as, you know, am I doing this the right way?"

After finding herself on her own as the singleton elementary art teacher, Marie began looking to outside sources for curriculum and teaching support. She has joined several on-line art teacher groups and uses resources such as Pinterest to explore lesson ideas and best practices. She commented,

> So, what I found is a big online presence of art teacher groups. That has been extremely helpful. As far as I could reach out to ask questions, but mainly seeing what other art teachers (are doing), and this is globally because these groups are from, you know, all over the world. It is interesting to see me in Cowtown, I'm having the same issues as somebody in Indiana is having as far as what they are

seeing with kids or even particular lessons or materials. What is working, what isn't. So, that has been really helpful for that past 5-10 years probably.

She continued by describing how this helped her to feel less alone, "Someone will ask a question and many people will respond this works this way, yah know, I tried this, this doesn't work…so that I found helpful. So, it is not talking to somebody, but it has been a good way to feel like I am not so alone. That I see that other art teachers are you know dealing with the same things."

When describing the grading system for art, Marie indicated that the district does not provide a 'report card" for Pre-K and that grades kindergarten through fifth grade are graded on a 1-4 "indicator" system that is based upon work completion, teacher observations, behavior, attitude, and effort. Sixth grade students earn numeric grades and after doing independent research, Marie developed a rubric to calculate this grade. She explained, "… I knew I had to back that up with something. I couldn't just randomly give them a 92. So, that is when I started doing rubrics based on their work. Sometimes I will have meetings with the kids. Sometimes I have had them self-grade. It's been all based on a rubric so I can actually come up with a number to put on a report card."

School and Community Support

When asked about school and community support for the arts and for her role as art teacher, Marie provided several examples of ways she feels supported and not supported. In general, when it comes to her feelings of the district's value for arts learning she stated,

> I think as far as like… I know in the past we have had art classes cut back in time, but I feel they have been built back up a little bit, so the kids do see art more often. There have been lean times, but I think that the current administration feels like it is important that kids do have enough time to do art. Providing the after-school activities so we can have an art club. I think that is great. Um, I just feel like, I feel like we are valued. I don't know, I'm just given that feeling. You know, our opinions are asked. When it is time for scheduling and like that, we are not just told what to do, we are asked would this work for you. So as much as they can, I feel like they do take us into account as far as our feelings on things.

Marie described her colleagues as very supportive and interested in "what we do in the art room." She described the feeling that the administration value special area teachers' content "on the same level" as classroom teachers and make efforts to keep them "in the loop" regarding information and decision-making regarding matters such as scheduling and new school-wide initiatives and training. Marie indicated that the Cowtown community is supportive of the arts and offers opportunities outside of school for children to be involved in arts related activities. She identified the library as an example of one community organization supportive of the arts.

Later, Marie provided examples of times she did not feel supported by her colleagues and administration. She stated, "I kind of, although I think our district's very good at recognizing the

arts and supporting the arts, I think sometimes you become a little bit of an afterthought that, like you're not part of a bigger group. So sometimes they kind of forget, okay what about the art person and librarian and other singletons, so I feel like sometimes we're kind of left off the discussions and planning and things like that." Marie ties her feelings of administrative and colleague lack of support to her perception that these individuals simply do not understand what goes on in an art classroom. She described it this way,

> Classroom teachers are fine if I am going to be doing something with them as far as a lesson with them. Well, I would not even say that, because I really don't feel like they understand my classroom setting. They don't understand a lot about what we do in special areas. So, sometimes I find that actually a hinderance. You know I'm like, yes, I'll do it but if you do it my way. (Laughs) Don't tell me what to do, I'll work with you, but it is sometimes hard. Because I really don't feel like a classroom teacher really gets what goes on in an art room.

She further explained that her schedule is much different than a classroom teacher's. She does not see the students daily, so her instructional time is limited, and she has a curriculum and standards to follow. She explained it this way, "You know when they have the kids all day every day they could squeeze in an extra thirty minutes, but I don't have that flexibility… also you know I have my own standards to work on. I can't just throw in something, you know, that is totally not related, to just take something off their plate. I have learned to say no."

When asked how often her administrator visits her art classroom, she indicated that she only sees them for "observations or if they need a student." She continued, "I wouldn't say anyone ever just pops in to see what is going on in the art room. They are also, I know, very busy. So, I would say for professional reasons but not to just check out what is going on in the art room." Marie reflected upon her role as an advocate for herself as an arts teacher and the art program "…in a school setting nobody else really understands exactly what teaching art is like. It's not like if I was a reading teacher, I could go to another teacher in a different grade level and still talk about reading and they would get it. Art's really, its alone in its' way of doing things sometimes." She continued, "I think you have to be an advocate for yourself, because you are the only one, so if something is happening, no one else is going, you don't have a team of people to say, you know, hey, that's not right or can we do something this way. We have run into that with schedules. So, in that case, the other special areas (teachers) are helpful, they might be experiencing the same thing. So, we as a group can go together, so, I'm one part of that smaller group."

Marie described how the special area teachers have created their own mini community. In recent years the special area teachers, library, music, gym, and art, have had a common lunch time. Even though they only have thirty minutes, these teachers make it a point to get together in the art room and share this common time for fellowship. Marie described how much she values this time to "have a breathing time" and take a break from her busy day. She also described how

this group, although teaching different content areas, share a common dynamic as singleton teachers. Over the years they have become a support group for one another professionally and personally. She commented, "We do discuss a lot of school related things at that time. So that has been very nice to have a common lunch time so we can actually meet with each other. We share the same classes (students) we share the same schedule, so it is nice to, it helps to not feel so isolated." She continued,

> Having that time, that thirty minutes during the day with the music teacher with the librarian, and we even have a new librarian, and she is eating lunch with us. That is super helpful for all of us because… I wouldn't say that we vent… but we do vent about how our last class just went. We all share the same classes (grade levels) so at least schedule and kids we share those things so we can definitely talk to that. The computer tech person has been coming in, she doesn't come in every day, but when she has had a particularly difficult class, she will come in and say, 'I need the hive mind' and she will say, 'I am having a problem with this kid, what works for you'. So that has been really awesome.

In this group Marie has found colleagues who, although they do not teach the same content area, share her experiences as a singleton teacher and can value the unique nature of the content she teaches.

Student Art Opportunities Outside of School

When asked about arts opportunities for students outside of school classes, Marie indicated that the Cowtown community is supportive of the arts and has community programs that local children can participate in. She did not provide any specific examples other than arts programs offered at the local public library. The district does support a fifth and sixth grade art club. Marie is the club advisor and facilitates art activities for these students one day after school for thirty minutes every other week. Marie also described after school as time fifth and sixth grade students can stay and work on art projects on days when there is a late bus.

Characteristics

When describing her experiences as a singleton, Marie identified the following characteristics. She characterized herself as the go to art expert for all questions art related. "I would say, being here now, being the art expert in the school, so anything, whether it's somebody, a teacher comes to you with a personal art question, something they're doing in the classroom, not necessarily even what you're doing in art, but you become the go to person to ask any art question, which is totally fine. Except, I'm only one person, I don't know, like, have experiences for everything. But I've been asked to, you know, help out with decorations for people's weddings and things like that, just because they think of me as like, okay, there's the art person, I will ask them."

Marie also described the responsibility that comes with being the only art influence for her students. She lamented feelings of sticking to her "comfort zone" because she does not have a colleague to share ideas with or to provide a different point of view, experience, and support. She stated, "I think that when you're with a partner, you bounce ideas back and forth. When you're alone, you have to, you know, I probably tend to go with my comfort zone. As far as things I'm comfortable doing, not necessarily trying something new, because I, you know, I'm not being taught or helped by someone else, I have to figure it out myself." She continued, "You know, the students are getting my experiences, my ideas, but, you know, in art, especially, there's so many ways you can accomplish a learning standard that I feel like that is missing, that they're not getting several different ways of accomplishing it. They're just getting one way." She concluded that, "as a singleton is you're just relying on yourself."

Marie also identified self-starter as a characteristic of her singleton experience. She noted, "I wrote self-starter (as a characteristic), as far as you have to do the research, you have to do the, you know, watch the videos, you have to find all the materials and try it yourself. So yeah, and that, that takes time. So, being one, if there's several people doing that you can kind of pool your ideas. If one person is to start something new. It takes a lot of time, because you're, you know, you're the only one doing it." She included here time-consuming as characteristic of the singleton experience.

Marie described how difficult it can be to your own advocate she stated, "Being one voice to fight against it, it's a lot harder than, you know, a team. So, in that case, being a singleton is hard, you're here advocating for yourself. And it's, you know, you got to be more vocal about it. I'm not that type of person. So, it's, it's difficult, you know, yeah." She identified that self-advocacy is a necessary characteristic of singleton-ness. Even though she self-identified as "not that type of person," Marie noted that there are times singletons must self-advocate. Marie described seeking out others to advocate for common needs. She reflected, "Well back to being part of a team, we kind of have our special areas team, but it's all, you know, between music and PE, and art and library, all totally very different things. So, we can relate in certain things like our schedule and things like that."

Singletons need to be adaptable and organized. Marie explained,

Yeah, as far as like scheduling time, you know, you have to have time to put up displays, the other teachers don't need to do. Just even like managing materials and getting things ready. Today, I had seven classes and in between, it's a lot, it's a lot to switch, you know, from kindergarten to fourth grade to, you know, Pre-K. I don't think they understand that as much. That it's not just their walking in the door, you have to be ready for them. And it's a different lesson for every class.

Marie continued, "I find that I have to be organized, because no one else is helping me, so I had to find ways to keep myself organized because… when we have the art show at the end of the year… I am the one responsible for every piece of artwork, getting it up, getting it prepared, so you know, it's a lot, so I have to become very organized in lots of ways as far as storage of projects and what to send home and don't send home…"

Routines are important. Marie described creating routines and procedures for her students to follow as essential for her busy art schedule and curriculum load as a singleton. She noted, "And it is great, because if you set up the structure early on, when they are in pre-k now, it does for the most part follow through. So, by the time they are in fourth, fifth, sixth grade, I can kind of skip over some procedural things because most of the time they should know where things are and how to take care of materials and so… I think it makes them more responsible for their own work and their own areas because they have been doing it for six – seven years now."

Another characteristic of the singleton art teaching experience Marie identified is relationship building. Because she sees all the students, year after year, she has developed relationships with the students and has had the opportunity to see their development and take pride in her role in their accomplishments. She reflected, "Which is nice you can see the growth a lot of times. Especially in the art field you can see the growth from little kid to big kid so that is really fun." She continued, "Every once in a while, it is kind of fun to be the only art teacher because you get… when there is a display up… people will come in and complement the kids and they know… I am proud of them because you know they did it in my room. Sometimes it is kind of, to be the only one, you feel special because you are the only art teacher." She also described the flip side of having the students year after year noting that, "Being responsible for every kid in the school, it's difficult because you're guaranteed that you are going to get every kid. You are not going to have a year off when there are difficult kids to deal with. You always have them."

Marie described some other disadvantages of being the only, singleton, art teacher. She noted, "I am, kind of, the supply cabinet for the school sometimes. And being the only art teacher, that I am the only place people can come and ask, and you know, I have learned to say no if I really don't have things to share." The terms isolation and lonely appeared in Marie's comments. When she described the advantages of having a common lunch time with her singleton colleagues, she noted that without this common time she would feel isolated and lonely, having little time throughout the day to interact with other teachers. She recalled liking having another art teacher to share materials and ideas with she reflected, "So, in that fact it was great to have an art teacher next door to say hey do you have scratch art pens I can borrow for this lesson she would have them. Now if I don't have something, I don't have it, yah know. (laughs). So, that was nice. Having materials shared, ideas shared, even if we weren't doing the same thing."

Marie identified autonomy as an advantage when being a singleton. She enjoys choosing her lessons and being able to work with the students at her own pace. She identified this as one of the only positives of being a singleton. She noted, "In a way, I think a positive about it (singleton-ness) is that I can go at my own pace. I am not worrying about, oh, they're finishing that, so my kids need to finish that. So, that is a positive but besides that that is probably the only positive I can think of as being the only one teaching art."

Personal Artmaking

When asked about her own art making, Marie described how she uses a great deal of her creative energy up with her students. She makes examples for the students and explores art forms and techniques on her own in preparation for new lesson activities. She explained, "Yeah, and I would say after doing art all day, in an elementary school it is a lot like, it is really creative as far as, like, I'm making examples and things and working with the kids, so kind of when I am home I'm kind of done. Like I am spent. Um, but yeah, it is definitely something I would like to do." Later she continued,

> So, on my own I wouldn't say I seek out (art making opportunities), well I have been doing my own, well I wouldn't say art, but I guess so. Recently I started to make a quilt, so I am learning about that, and I don't go to (classes), you know, the internet helps you. I can find U-tube videos on everything. So, at home I do feel like I am keeping my own art going by doing different things. My daughter and I were doing a bunch of printmaking last summer. Which was fun I kind of taught her, but I was able to do my own things at the same time. So, for myself, I wouldn't say I seek out (opportunities) because I don't have time to take classes and things like that. But I definitely look for opportunities to do that (create art).

Challenges

In addition to the challenges of managing curriculum, providing variety in content and working "out of her comfort zone", not having a planning and idea partner, having to be the resident "art expert" and supply closet, etc. already described, Marie explained the difficulty in leaving school to attend professional development offerings. She commented, "Yeah, I mean, it's difficult to leave your classroom and go to a place and meet with other people, just because now it's very hard to leave with the sub situation. You know, if you have somebody else coming in your room, you're not typically continuing on (with the project you are doing) so you get behind in a project." This, combined with the limited time Marie sees her students, creates a challenge for her to overcome to be able to attend the professional development that is offered during the school day. Currently there is a significant shortage of substitute teachers, making it even more difficult for teachers to be allowed time away from the classroom. Marie described it this way,

> At school, the predicament at school is, it is really hard to leave for the day. With the lack of subs, setting up things for a sub, it is pretty much a waisted day

because there really isn't much I can have the sub do that is following what we are already doing. So, it is just a lot of free time, and you know one day projects. Then I feel like that gets me off track. We need to keep moving along. So, I find it really hard to take the time to go to Art Leadership and other conferences and stuff like that. I just feel like I am missing so much here, it is just not easy to do. It is sometime easier to just stay here. You know. Unfortunately. With the sub situation now, it could be a TA coming in and I feel bad for them.

When asked if the sub is ever an art content specialist Marie replied, "It is never a content specialist, never, I cannot remember… I think maybe one time. That is the only art person I can think of."

Marie described her concern for a new teacher coming into her position as a lone art teacher when she retires. She stated,

So, I feel like, you know, this is setting up a disaster for whoever is going to be coming in, you know, just …even if they have experience teaching. It's just overwhelming, you'd have to learn all the kids' names, you see the whole school, you know, it's just, it's overwhelming. I mean, I'm managing because I have a lot of things under my belt already. And I can, you know, add what I need to, but if I didn't, it would be crazy. It really would. It would be a lot. So, I feel like, you know, I don't want to leave, you know, thinking is just going to keep getting worse and worse, when already it's pretty much at the level of like, it would be difficult for somebody that hasn't been here for a long time.

When Marie began teaching at Cowtown Elementary, she had support from another veteran mentor art teacher who helped her learn classroom routines, shared materials, and helped her develop lesson ideas for her students. Only with time has she been able to transition into the role of singleton elementary art educator in her district. Although the changes over the years were challenging, she was able to work through the changes relying upon the knowledge, routines, and organization skills she had developed over the years. Marie reflected upon these changes and stated,

You know it is funny, so much has changed. I guess, with school, you take… like every year is a new year. It is the same job, but it is not the same job at all. It is different kids, it is different schedules, its different people, so I almost think that kind of gets you, draws you in thinking like, okay, I can do this for this year, but it will change next year. It will be different next year and hoping it will be better in some way, sometimes it's not, but I think education draws you in like that. Because every year is a totally different year. It's not, it doesn't turn into drudgery, like oh, I need a change. Because there is going to be some sort of change every year, positive or not. So, I think that is interesting because I think back on all my time here, it has been completely different. You know, go back ten years, fifteen years, twenty years, it is like it was a totally different experience then. Every year I think it can't get worse (laughs), but maybe it does (laughs). I have always said that, but every year things maybe get worse but then there are

good things too. Your administrators come and go. I really like the administrators we have now, so that helps.

Marie also identified time as a challenge for her as a singleton art teacher. She is the lone teacher in the school, making it her sole responsibility to prepare and display work, take care of materials, prepare lessons, and accommodate all the students' learning needs. She described how other teachers and administrators do not really understand the scope of her responsibilities and content specialty and noted, "nobody else really understands exactly what teaching art is like" and art is "alone in its way of doing things." She later added, "So yeah, that as far as being a singleton makes it even harder, because you're the only person there and you got to pick up the slack."

Skills for Success

Marie described being a self-starter, being organized, having a routine for herself and students, and accessing on-line art teachers and resources as skills she has developed that help her be a successful art teacher. Additionally, Marie is easygoing and gets along well with her colleagues. She has found balance in her workday, making time to "breathe" and interact with other singleton educators in her building. This "special areas" community has helped her feel less isolated and lonely. Marie is resourceful and has taken the initiative to develop curriculum to meet her students' needs, even without help from colleagues and the administration. Marie embraces change and challenge, commenting that she enjoys the fact that teaching is constantly changing from year to year.

Wants

When asked about her professional needs and wants, Marie described wanting to connect with other art educators. She stated,

> What I would need and want is a chance to get together with other art educators. And, you know, when we were doing the Art Leaderships (workshops) and there were other elementary school art teachers. Even though we were supposed to be doing, you know, this or that, we found ourselves just talking about, like, 'Well, what are you doing in first grade right now?' because, you know, it's great to be able to compare and get ideas from other people. I do as much as I can, like through the internet, and look, there's a lot out there, but having someone who actually experienced it and did the lesson, that was successful. That's great. Because, you know, that's, that's something I can't get day to day.

Additionally, she described wanting a local network of art educators to interact with to share ideas and resources and work on curriculum. Although she belongs to a larger network of art teachers online, she described the advantages of creating a more local network of teachers who would be able to share information about local resources and opportunities. She commented, "I think it would be the best for a singleton person feeling like you have a team,

even if they're not in the same building as you." She also described a desire to have the opportunity to connect to professional artist. She recalled a PD workshop she attended where she was able to attend a workshop with a Lego artist,

> Well, like, last year, we went to the …BOCES…arts leadership group …they brought in that Lego artists. That was awesome. And I think about that still, you know. Be(ing) exposed to new and different ideas, artists and ideas…Am I doing Legos in class with my kids? No, but it was still a really cool, like, I never knew there was artists who dealt with Legos … so that was, for me, personally, really cool thing. And I feel like I could kind of relate to kids because I do have kids that are into Legos. And I can have a discussion about like, hey, did you know that, you know, there's this guy who does this and I could show them images…things like that are really cool…being exposed to new things, whether I'm going to use it in my classroom or not. It's always good as an artist to like, you know, see what's out there. You're not just stuck in the old, you know, doing the same thing.

She also described how having a network of singleton educators could help offset feelings of being overwhelmed by information and the task of following up with training on your own. She described being at PD training with districts that had several art teachers,

> Well, you know, when we've been at Art Leadership and there's districts that have 5, 6, 7 art teachers, and that's not even all of them…I can't even imagine what that would be, like, just coming from here. And, you know, mostly being a singleton. So, yeah, it's totally different because they have, they have their own little network already. And, and it almost gets overwhelming. Yeah, like, oh, that all sounds fantastic. But okay, I would have to do this. And then this and then this, so it's a little overwhelming. A great idea. But yeah.

Marie admits that scheduling an ideal time for professional development is difficult. She noted that, "It's either taking away from class, or it's after school and nobody… I've had seven classes today; I don't want to go. You know, I'm fried. I can't, you know, as awesome as it is, you know, but yes, something that would make it not harder, make my job harder, but enhance it."

Summary

Although Marie would like to participate in personal art making and professional development with other area art teachers, it is difficult for her to fine the time and creative energy to add this to the many responsibilities of her role as singleton art teacher at Cowtown Elementary School. Over time, Marie has developed skills and routines to help her manage her busy work schedule. She has also committed time to interact daily with other 'special areas" teachers in her building. This lunch group supports one another personally and professionally, sharing stories of their experiences in and out of the classroom. Marie admits that without this time of fellowship she would feel alone and isolated in her profession since there is very little

time throughout the day to interact with classroom teachers. Additionally, she admits that her administrators and non-art colleagues have little understanding of her role as an arts teacher.

Marie does feel that the school district and community value arts learning in general, but art education is at times an afterthought, especially when it comes to scheduling. Marie has a very hectic schedule where different grade levels meet for different number of times throughout her week. This hectic schedule is due to fitting special area subject class times into the schedule around regular classroom instructional times. She stated that the schedule changes from year to year. This adds difficulty to her curriculum planning since the amount of instructional time she has with each grade level can also change. The biggest change came when they decreased the number of art teachers at the elementary school from two to one and student instructional time was cut in half and Marie became the lone art teacher. Marie explains that it would be difficult for a new teacher to step into her position since there have been many adaptations she has made over the years that have helped her manage her busy schedule and curricular and classroom management demands. Her ability to be organized, develop routines with the students and for herself, and her disposition of being easy-going and a self-starter have helped mitigate the challenges of being a singleton art educator.

Marie identified the following characteristics of her singleton-ness and skills for success. She has learned to say no, seeks out support and fellowship from her singleton colleagues, has learned to be a self-advocate and is organized. She described herself as being self-reliant and a self-starter. She is adaptable and a researcher who seeks out professional support online to develop her knowledge and improve her curriculum. She noted that a singleton is a one-man-show and there are many demands to being the only content specialist in you building.

Marie identified several challenges that go along with her singleton experience. Being the only art teachers in her Pre-K- sixth grade building creates a demanding schedule. Being the only art teacher, and the infrequency of time she sees her students, makes it difficult to take time away from the classroom for professional development. She recalled how nice it was to have a content peer to share the load and bounce ideas off early in her career. She identified how challenging it was to not have a partner or team to work with. She also identified that she has had little help with curriculum development over the years and rarely meets with the other art teachers in the district. Additionally, Marie shared that there is little understanding of her content specialty among her colleagues and administration. She identifies that because she is the only one and because she doesn't have content support, she tends to stay in her comfort zone when it comes to curriculum development.

Marie enjoys the year-to-year variety teaching offers and the relationships she can foster with her students and watching them develop artistically over the years she has been their teacher. She would like to be a part of a local network of art educators and be able to share ideas and local resources. She enjoys learning about other artists and artforms and described the value of having PD opportunities to meet and learn from such artists. She recognizes the value of the

variety such experiences would bring to her classroom and students. She would like the opportunity to engage in these experiences but is unsure how that could be managed between the shortage of substitute teachers, lack of substitutes that are art content specialists, and her limited and hectic schedule. She identified how difficult it is for a lone content specialist, who only sees her students for forty minutes once every three to four days, to leave the classroom to attend PD offerings. She did, however, recognize that without her early experiences with a co-teacher and getting some skills "under her belt" before becoming a singleton at Cowtown, she would have struggled with the demands of singleton teaching. It would have been "overwhelming" to her, and she fears it will be overwhelming for the next art teacher who takes her place when she retires if the necessary adjustments and supports are not put into place.

Despite the challenges and many twists and turns over the years, Marie described how much she enjoys the autonomy of being a singleton. She enjoys creating her lessons and seeing the growth in her students' abilities over time. She noted that this was the biggest pro of singleton-ness and working in a small district; getting to build relationships with the students and taking pride and "feeling special" when the students' work is recognized and complemented by her colleagues and the community.

Clover's Story ~ Cowtown Jr/Sr High School

Teacher Background Demographics

Clover (pseudonym) grew up in the southern tier of New York State. She attended a suburban school district that graduated around three hundred and fifty students a year and despite the large class size, she recalled knowing most of her classmates. Her high school had a strong art program, and she had the opportunity to take many art courses. Clover recalled, "So, I was always in the art classes, but I never felt like it was a career move. I didn't even think about being an art teacher. But I don't know as though I would really say I had any pushing to think about my future. Or a career path." Her mother was a nurse and her father a builder. Her parents did not push her towards secondary education. In high school she describes herself as an athlete and average to good student with an interest in history. In her senior year she took an interior design elective and discovered a love for interior design and spaces. She recalled, "I've always been a little bit creative. And I did have a natural ability with some of my art. So, you know, I felt probably a sense of success with it, too. So, what are you good at? Well, I'm good at art. I enjoy art." Clover also recalled her good relationships with her teachers, "I loved my coaches. My social studies teacher and I really connected in my junior year, and I love just how he engaged you in a different way." She recalled art projects she loved in school and the success she felt from being in those classes. Despite living near a large city, Clover did not recall participating in many art offerings as a young person outside of school.

After graduation from high school, she enrolled in Onondaga Community College's interior design program. Discovering that she didn't like the "rigidity" of the program, she switched to graphic design. Through this journey Clover discovered a love for art history. Combining two subjects she loved in high school. She transferred to S.U.N.Y. Cortland and enrolled in their Art History writing intensive program. Following college, Clover explored art opportunities in the private sector and traveled to Europe where she had the opportunity to take in the culture and visit galleries and museums. These experiences solidified her interest in pursuing a career in the art field. Ultimately, she decided to enroll in the Art Education program at Syracuse University. She stated, "I'd finally landed and got serious about a program." Clover's experiences traveling and studying art history would later inspire her elementary art curriculum.

Reflecting upon her pre-service teaching experiences, Clover described that between her art education methods courses, Saturday Morning Workshop clinical program teaching art to school aged children and required education courses feeling well prepared for her student teaching assignments. When asked about her teaching experiences, she described having practicum experience in an urban setting and student teaching at two larger sub-urban/urban school districts. She did not have rural or small school teaching experience in her preservice teacher training program.

Clover has been teaching art in public schools for twenty-five years. She has taught visual arts at Cowtown Central Schools (pseudonym) for twenty-four years. After completing a

temporary position at another comparable district, Clover began her career at Cowtown teaching at the kindergarten through sixth grade elementary school for seven years before being transferred to Cowtown's Junior/Senior High School. For her first seven years, Clover worked with another elementary art teacher sharing the course load in a K-6 building. Each teacher taught different sections of each grade level. Clover described how fortunate she was to have a partner teacher when she began her career. She remembered, "It was nice that I had someone to feed off of and to bounce ideas…I had an instant partner with Marie (pseudonym). I had a dream job!" Although Marie went on maternity leave shortly after Clover began teaching her first year, she noted that initial support and guidance was helpful in her early days at Cowtown Elementary. Marie and Clover spent the next seven years working together and collaborating on curriculum and programming for their elementary learners.

In February of 2007, the district experienced financial and enrollment challenges causing Clover to have to make a difficult career decision. She remembered,

> I had someone knock at my door around budget time, so probably February, and told me that I had two options. I could stay half-time teaching art and take over the gifted, Horizons, program or move to the high school full-time and teach seventh through twelfth grade because our numbers were shifting that year. It was a little intimidating to go down to a district office with a union rep. When I walked into the administrator's office, I wasn't really prepared for what was happening. So, I thought about it. I couldn't really talk to anyone about it. I was told not to, other than Marie, probably. And they let me take a half day to drive to a neighboring district and look at their gifted program. They didn't tell the other teacher, who was teaching it (Horizons) at the time, that this was happening. So, I felt like I was carrying this heavy burden of… she was probably going to be asked to retire… So that was kind of turning my world upside down. And I just said, there's no way I want to be wearing two hats like that. I'm an art teacher. So, I just decided to make the shift to the high school.

Clover had some experience with the Jr/Sr high school environment. She recalled traveling from the elementary school to the high school to teach ninth period studio art classes until the district hired a part-time Jr/Sr high school art teacher. Unfortunately, since the position was part-time, these teachers frequently left to pursue other art teaching opportunities. Clover commented, "There was always turnover. They, I think, were in a computer room. So, it was not an ideal situation." Clover also coached at the Jr/Sr high school, making the high school environment a bit more familiar. She explained, "I did the shuffle for two or three years. And I felt comfortable up here with the high school art teacher. I coached so I was in the building a lot. I got to know a lot of the kids. But it was, it was awful." Clover remembered she didn't like being told she had to change positions and move to another building. Looking back, she admits that the change may have been "a blessing I didn't know I needed at the time." She now appreciates the challenges this change presented and the work she did with the high school art teacher to "come up with curriculum and kinda start my own program".

To "soften the blow" the district purchased a kiln and clay slab roller for Clover to be able to teach ceramics. Previously there had not been a ceramics program at the high school. She began her new position teaching two twenty-week sections of eighth grade art, three sections of Studio Art, and a section of ceramics. Later her schedule would expand to include seventh grade art. The "new" art classroom was a repurposed Family and Consumer Science room complete with sinks, stoves, and a refrigerator, but little working counter space and limited room for tables and chairs. Kitchen-style cabinetry lined the walls. There were two adjacent storage areas, one housing the kiln, slab roller, and clay materials and another with shelving and floor space shared with the agriculture teacher. This would remain her classroom environment for the next fourteen years, until a recent art wing renovation project.

Teaching Environment

Cowtown Central School is in the town center of a small rural community. The district serves 700 students (data.nysed.gov) and has two buildings on campus. One, being the elementary building where Marie continues to teach, and the other being a Jr/Sr high school building located an athletic field's walking distance from the elementary building. Both buildings are on the same side of the road and connected by a driveway and sidewalks. According to census data, the district is identified as Rural (42) Distant with a community population of 6,005 +/- 241 residents (Census.gov). Clover now lives in the town center only minutes from the high school.

In 2022-3, the district renovated the art classrooms. Clover's new classroom is double the size of her original space. There is a classroom area and designated clay space. She explained,

> I have a nice studio space for working on art projects. And then there's a designated clay space as well, but not a designated clay working space. So, I'm cleaning the same tables, the clay students are working on the same tables that the 2D kids are working on. So that gets a little frustrating at times. But the space has lent itself better, there's more sinks equipped in the new space. There's more storage. Supplies are easier to access.

Although the art teachers were included in the renovation process and plans for the new classrooms, not all the input was taken into consideration when the final design choices and materials were selected. For example, initially the sinks were too shallow for an art classroom and the cabinets were hung too low for students to be able to use the counter space, ultimately these issues were corrected. The new space is lined with tall storage cabinets and has some counter space under the windows and around the sink area. Clover noted, "I am still a little disappointed with our display space as far as wall space. We don't have a lot of wall space to put up (artwork and examples). We're hanging onto cabinets, any resources we use or exemplars, but we figure it out." Clover jokingly remarked, "…there was nowhere to go but up." Clover's classroom has a doorway that leads directly into the other art classroom where the two teachers share access to a copier machine and each other's classrooms.

When you enter the long rectangular room there are four large square waist-high tables with four chairs each and one lower, square ADA accessible table with four chairs. The tables are large enough for students to each have their own work area without overlapping each other's space. To the right is Clover's Promethean board and her desk area in front of the end wall. On the wall there are two magnetic whiteboards. On the long walls there are counters with three sinks on one side and windows and counters with under storage on the other side. In the middle between the two windowed areas there is a tall cabinet area and counter where Clover keeps her cutting board. On the other long wall there are closed cabinets under and above the counter areas. The two ends of the room, on the long side, have ceiling to floor cabinets. The end of the room with Clover's desk is used for student seating and art making. The other end has an area designated for clay building. There is a kiln in the window side corner and a large utility sink on the end wall next to a door that leads to the other art classroom. There are two ceramic wheels and a slab rolling table in this space along with two tall worktables with stools. Clover has placed additional storage cabinet and drying racks in the space between the two sections of the room to create two working spaces. Although the new art room is much better than her previous classroom, Clover noted that she teaches both 2D art forms and ceramics and the students use the same tables for both art forms. This can be challenging when cleaning up from one medium to another.

Scheduling

There are still two art teachers in the Jr/Sr high school. Clover teaches 10-week rotations of seventh grade and eighth grade art, one section of Studio Art, one section of Creative Crafts (a Studio Art alternative), and Ceramics I, II, and III, each 20-week courses. Additionally, Clover has a homeroom duty and study hall duty, one preparation period and a thirty-minute lunch break. The high school art teacher teaches Advanced Art I, II, and Senior Survey, one section of Studio Art, 20-week sections of Computer Illustration I and II and Photography I and II, and two sections of sixth grade art where she travels to the elementary school every other day. For the past two years, because the high school art teacher was assigned to teach sections of sixth grade art at the elementary school, Clover has had one section of Studio Art added to her schedule.

Typically, there are between 15-20 students in Clover's classes and the classes are forty-two minutes long with four minutes between classes. Clay courses can be mixed with advanced students pushing in with clay I and II. Clover described the advantages and disadvantages of allowing multiple levels of students in clay studio classes this way, "I asked them (counselors) to steer away from adding clay ones into clay two courses because it's just overwhelming. We did that one 20-week semester, and it was difficult to teach students clay basics while progressing with the clay twos, it was just too much." Scheduling students for art elective classes can be difficult in Cowtown because many of the elective classes across the district are offered at the same time. Additionally, the time and the number of available course sections are limited to what the singleton teacher's schedule will allow.

Clover described the challenges of teaching multiple grade levels and content specialties as a singleton teacher in a small district, "It's like I wear so many hats all day and teaching. It's not gourmet, like I was at Francesca's for dinner, I was at McDonald's drive thru trying to teach a little bit well, instead of maybe mastery in some of the courses, because you're trying to switch gears all day and work with different content. To go from clay to eighth grade to seventh grade and studio, all in the same room. I mean, that's what being a singleton means to me."

Budget

When asked about financial support for her programming, Clover stated, "Budget wise, I feel like I've always had a good support system as far as getting what we needed." She described instances of having to "tighten our checkbooks up" in different years but overall, she described a financial environment that supported her curriculum. Additionally, when Clover moved to the high school, the district demonstrated financial support for developing a ceramics program by buying a kiln and slab roller. Supplies and materials for clay building became part of the general art budget to support these courses.

Recently, Clover petitioned to add a Creative Crafts class to her course offerings as an alternative to the ninth grade required Studio Art course. This course would also fulfill the N.Y.S. Arts credit requirement for graduation. She did, however, describe times she spent her own money to get things she needed for her students and her classroom stating, "I've paid for a lot of things out of pocket that I found out later in my course year that I needed. I remember spending almost $800 on stained glass. Getting a cutter and yeah… I didn't feel as though the budget was… we were basically told you know, there wasn't any add-ons to the curriculum budget. So, I didn't have open purchase offers (PO) left. So, building the plane while I was flying it."

Clover has expressed that the budgeting process can be stressful and filled with uncertainty when it is unclear how many students you will have in your electives and what your budget numbers will be for the upcoming year. She is expected to find the best prices for the materials she needs, including three quotes for items that are considered equipment, and prepare this documentation for her district administrator. Each budget season Clover puts in requisitions for items she needs for the following school year. She is asked to list items as "must haves" or "nice to haves". The district, depending upon the availability of funds, decides if the budget will support the "must haves" as well as the "nice to haves". Typically, she works off the budget from the previous year.

Because scheduling for electives courses is limited to when students can fit these courses into their required course schedule, Clover often does not know how many students she will have in her courses the following year at the time of preparing her budget order. Having an open purchase order for some consumable items helps with this dilemma but there have been times, as

illustrated earlier, that the money runs out. Additionally, this year the district is facing a budget deficit and teachers have been warned that there will be some cuts across all spending and in all departments. Last year, in anticipation of state funding cuts, the district cut back some district art funds asking the elementary art teacher to reduce her materials order. There is uncertainty about the budget situation for the 2024-25 school year and the impact it will have on the high school arts program.

Curriculum

Early in her teaching career, Clover was fortunate to have a colleague and mentor to work alongside at the elementary school. She described her experience,

> It was such a nice experience over there then. Marie had done such a nice job (developing the program) … I think it was just a really nice fit. For me to have fresh new ideas and Marie's experience, you know…we started a Post Office exhibit where we put some cork board up and we would do a monthly exhibit…we got a grant and we created a mural (with the students) …You know, like, there were some really neat things that we did. And you are at the prime of your career where you're the most energetic and enthusiastic. And so, it was a really nice experience to be at Cowtown and that probably let me sink my teeth into this district and not hop.

In her early career at the elementary school Clover relied upon her art history knowledge to help "drive" her lessons. She explained, "…it wasn't a learning curve until I left the elementary school. My initial experience, my background lended itself, because I incorporated so much more art history (in)to my projects, so much more of my knowledge to the elementary projects that I was doing grade level wise." She was able to incorporate different artists and styles, she explained, "I remember, Monet, flowers for kindergarten. I mean, I can literally, like, make a list. Seurat and the dots, the little dot paintings…Salvador Dali, somehow, we would do our imagination drawings. There were so many different little projects."

Despite being moved to the Jr/Sr high school after seven years at the elementary school, Clover still felt supported by the administration and by her new high school art colleague. The district had purchased equipment for her to start a ceramics program and the high school art teacher was happy the district was supporting another full-time art teacher position in the building. After many years of changes in staffing of the part-time position, now there would be stability in the Jr/Sr high school "art department". Clover's new colleague willingly shared her lesson materials for the 20-week eighth grade course she was now assigned to teach. Lessons such as an armature lesson and silk scarf lesson she provided Clover still teaches as part of the now 10-week eighth grade art requirement. Other curriculum resources she pulled from her experiences in her methods courses and resources she found on her own or at arts professional development. She explained,

There was not a lot of it (curriculum materials). It was almost a sink or swim, especially with Studio Art. There are so many ways to achieve our standards, so you ended up kind of putting down your own pavers, for your path. So, I would not say there was one iota of any district catalog or assessment tool that was ever given to me or rubric. That all came from exemplars I'd either got in my grad courses, or I'd gotten at professional development that I went to. I did attend the New York State Art Teachers Association (NYSATA) workshop conferences where they were working on the big (art)curriculum binder. So, I remember using that. That was a huge tool for me.

Over the years there have been different initiatives for curriculum development at Cowtown and Clover recalled working with another singleton in the physical education department on 21st century skills and devising a grading rubric. She explained,

Um, I think my template was devised. Believe it or not, I think it was back when we're trying to incorporate 21st century skills. And I remember the physical education teacher and I, sitting and coming up with that. I mean, a basic lesson plan gets modeled after what I learned at Syracuse, but how that evolved, we looked at a few different templates. And so, it rolled in from there and of course, has been updated with our (new) standards. And we tried to make it a one stop shop for our administrators to be able to check off what we're doing. To make clear what we're doing or accomplishing. Assessment tools, oh my gosh, those have just been a work in progress. Over the years, I know, I think some of my art resource books I've picked apart and typed up my own Frankenstein version of some of it put together. I think the one bar graph type one that I came up with was based on some book that I had, that I loved how they broke down the process of the project kind of into different skills. Yeah, almost like ten attributes of what could be part and parcel to your project.

Clover described the challenges of curriculum work. There are three art teachers in the district but they each teach different courses or grade levels except for class assignments that get shifted due to enrollment and scheduling. Such as, Clover teaching a section of Studio Art so the high school art teacher can cover two sections of sixth grade art at the elementary. She explained,

There're just three little bears in our district to work from. We do collaborate once in a while with band or chorus or, you know ag (agriculture), the (special areas) departments get together. There's not a lot of time for it, either. There's no common planning for us. We don't get the same periods off to really work unless it's a coincidence. So, it's not a structured time to meet as a team.

Clover noted that in the past she has not been "denied" time to work on curriculum when she asked for it. The district will allow her and her two colleagues to ask for half-days to work on curriculum. She stated, "We can put in for some half days, typically, to work together as a team. I don't think, I don't know if I've ever been told no on those curricular days, we can put in for

summer hours if we want. And then if we see a workshop, we're interested in or professional development, we're usually encouraged to take advantage of those."

Recently with a substitute teacher shortage in the district it is difficult to get coverage for multiple teachers to be out of their classrooms on any given day. Clover added, "And we're always told, we have a sub shortage too… which is annoying." When asked if all the art teachers were allowed to attend out of district professional development together, she responded, "Oh, God. No…So, say, for the Arts Leadership, you know, they were okay with sending a representative from over here and one perhaps in elementary school, but not necessarily the whole team every time." Clover noted that it had been a long time since she had asked to attend an out of school professional development training or workshop. She stated, "I haven't done any formal PD in so long."

Last year, the district changed leadership and the new superintendent has launched a district wide curriculum initiative where grade level teams or content areas have been asked to identify their power standards and create documents demonstrating how their curriculum supports these standards. Professional development days have been dedicated to learning how to approach this process and teachers have been provided with time, bi-weekly, to work on their standards documents. Every other week during after school hours (approximately 45 minutes) curriculum (subject) teams are expected to get together and work on this task. Although this demonstrates some understanding from the administration that this task requires time, Clover described the difficulty with meeting every other week for such a short period of time. "Timewise it's definitely not enough time. I think it may offset some other work that we have to do that could give us more time on our own, but we find that by the time we figure out where we've left off on our development of our priority standards and mapping those, it's time to go. And we've forgone being able to work with students or meet with our club(s). So, it's more frustrating than productive."

Additionally, since singleton teachers teach unique content courses and do not share these courses with other teachers, even within their general discipline, these teachers are expected to come up with documentation for their course curriculum completely on their own, without outside support. There is no "team" to help Clover analyze and organize her ceramics course curriculum or her Creative Crafts course. The art teachers can help each other identify priority standards for Pre-K through twelve visual arts curricula, but each teacher is solely responsible for the grade levels and courses they teach. This distinction was identified by the administration and Clover mentioned an upcoming meeting that was being held to address the timeline and expectations for teachers who were singletons teaching specialty courses.

When asked where she draws her inspiration and knowledge for her personal art development and course curriculum, Clover described it this way,

Oh, gosh, development. I have done a lot of believe it or not, it's a day of YouTube training almost. So, you can almost do any professional skill set

development on your own that you need to … I've taken the course. I don't think I've ventured, I always said I was going to be a lifelong learner. And I don't know if I do that in a formal setting as much as I should.

Clover recalled a Ukrainian egg decorating class she took to explore this artform for her creative crafts class and other online tutorials and trainings she has independently sought out. She noted, "Yes, that (research of lessons) I tried to make as unencumbering to my teaching day as I can, so I do a lot after work or weekends. I'll just, I don't know, you worry about your time and being out of the room." Clover stated, "Just, I, it's so funny that I just don't want to take time from teaching to do that." She continued to describe how leaving the classroom to attend professional development is difficult. She explained,

> Oh, gosh, well, the older I get, the more life goes on. I don't worry so much about the sub being here and (life) will carry on, but it does impact my 10 weeks (courses) you know, if I'm out for any day, I just feel like it's time away. I've always had this feeling like I shouldn't be out of my room. I don't like taking time out of my room. (For what reason?) Oh, the organizational piece, the prepping for it. Supplies. I don't feel as though our subs can come into the room and do the instruction or skill sets as easy as other classes, being a performance base kind of course it's just…

When asked to explain further she stated,

> Oh, my gosh, we'd get a random teacher that would be on the creative side but never an art teacher. We don't get an *art* sub. So yeah, we sometimes have a (district) teacher covering our room. So, it's almost unless you devise a plan for yourself to be out when you have a transition day where you stop (the lesson) that would be it…Oh, yeah. And you waste supplies, you waste, I could waste a whole silk scarf tomorrow. And yeah, I mean, there's no bad scarf. But yeah, you know, especially with clay, a class of 27 students, to just roll the dice on. And hope that something goes right or… Yeah, there's so many moving parts to being out.

Access

Clover's classroom is in an annex to the main gathering area of the Jr/Sr high school building. The main entrance is also off from this open gathering area referred to as the *lobiteria* (cafeteria and lobby) where there is space for drop down tables where students eat their lunch. Surrounding this gathering space is the cafeteria and kitchen at one end and the main office suite at the other. The entrance to the auditorium is on one side and a wall divides the lobiteria and one of the school gyms is on the other side. There is a u-shaped hallway that leads around the gym, down a hallway past the technology/shop rooms and athletic entrance area, around the corner past the athletic wing locker rooms, bathrooms, and offices, around another corner with the agriculture classroom and chorus room off a short hallway to the left and the two art classrooms continuing around the gym to the right. There is a large boys and girls bathroom area in this hallway before you reach a hallway that exits off to the left to the rest of the building past the

library, mailroom, nurse, and counseling offices. If you continue straight, you will circle back around the u-shape back into the *lobiteria* space near the main office suite.

Since this area of the building is in a separate wing of the building from the other academic classrooms, there is little opportunity for Clover to interact with other teachers in the building. She explained, "My partner's next door. So, there are some days she's the only interaction I have. We don't have to pass by an office or, or sign in anywhere. So, if we leave, it's up to our discretion. So, I mean, I don't know, I wouldn't say there's a lot of teacher interaction for me. Not passing by a lot of faculty on the way to my room."

Clover likes being on the first floor and having access to the outside for herself and her students. There is no designated restroom area for teachers in this part of the building and the teacher's room is in the other wing of the building. Clover admits that she does not seek out others at lunch time, she stated, "I do not venture? I'll leave the building, sometimes for my lunch, to walk my dog because I live in the village. Or I work through it." Clover and the other high school art teacher's classrooms share a connecting doorway that allows the teachers and students to freely pass between the art classrooms. This was a new development when the district renovated the classrooms. It allows the students and teachers to access the computer area and available printers. Other teachers, music, tech., ag., and P.E. teachers also share access to this printer. When asked about professional interaction with other educators in her building, Clover responded,

> So, our level 7-12, I don't feel like I'm able to do a lot of the interdisciplinary (lessons) that I was doing in the elementary level, there was more interaction, I don't know why or how, probably I haven't really thought about it. But I think I'm so busy doing, at this level, 7-12, attendance, five-week grades, I don't have time to. If I'm not teaching, I'm doing something else, and I don't have time to go. And I don't leave my room sometimes. I don't check my mailbox every day, I don't go to the office some days, I go to the parking lot, to my room, back to my car.

Clover is the *encore* (art, band, chorus, technology, agriculture, and health) department chair. This also provides another opportunity for Clover to access to other teachers in the building. Clover and the other department chairs attend monthly meetings with the administration. She then schedules a monthly meeting with the rest of the encore department teachers. Although these teachers teach different content areas, this provides an opportunity for these teachers to gather and share information. Clover has the unique role of communicating information between the group and the administration. She described how her role as a department chair for such a diverse group is at times difficult. When asked if her role included more than disseminating information from the administration, she remarked,

> No, and I don't see how even being for ten teachers. For those, even for ag. and tech., for chorus and band, for me to even be able to do anything specific for those areas of our department because it is different content, it's different issues, it's

different. Their day is different than ours, band and chorus. But in a bigger district, you'd have a vocal and a choral music department chair, you'd have a visual arts chair that could probably have eight art teachers under them, you know, so I think in a smaller district, our role (chair) is very minimal. Other than being, like, the bulletin board for what's happening administratively and what to expect and, and to be a filter for that.

Clover shared how the department head meetings seem to be a place where administration can share information and get initial feedback. She remarked, "And it's helpful to him (the principal) I know on a few occasions, especially with a new administrator, it's been helpful for him to hear. I think it's more beneficial for administrations, so it's, I can see why they do it."

Clover, as a singleton, recognized some of the challenges of being a self-advocate. She explained, "So, I think you have to also be assertive because you have to go to bat for yourself sometimes on some issues that no one else is facing. Or, you know, if you're a department chair, you have to hear and help other people navigate some of that too." Clover identified how the encore department supports one another. She explained, "Because I have other singleton's that I can have, you know, diatribe with about our headaches. So, it doesn't have to be in your content to be able to have a little bit of a circle. Support circle, you know." When asked if she found support with this group she responded, "Yeah, I think so. I think to an extent, that's also people that you groove with, you know, we groove with those special content area teachers. I think a little bit more than like, I don't go sit and have professional banter and discourse with math, you know, it's just a different animal." Bringing her department together for regular meetings has created a space for social and professional interaction among its members.

When Clover was asked about student access to her room she responded,

Yeah, we have a tenth period, per se, it's an activity period for 45 minutes that students can be in. It's a little limited this year with some curriculum work from the district, and it's also our club meeting time. So, student access this year has been a little bit restricted. But there are a lot of chances for them to come in. And I'll have some students get passes from me during the day to come and work during another class or if I feel like they can work independently without much oversight. (And there's enough space.) Yeah, there is.

Clover's room is always open to students. Since she was a coach for many years, she also had times her players would "hang out" in her room after school before practice and work on homework or art projects. Her door is always open and her classroom welcoming.

School and Community Support

When asked about school and community support for the arts specifically, Clover commented,

Um, I don't know. I feel like sometimes we're just left to our own device. And I don't know if that's always support. I think it's hoping for the best and letting them just do what they do. You know, sometimes with our art show… we'd love to have some new display boards, you know, we have to seek that out and possibly find funding for that, it's kind of mixed. I think administratively they work with us as far as coursework and adding courses if we wanted to. I guess it depends on the semantics of the *support* word. You know. Are we selected or singled out, you know, when we don't seek it out? Probably not. Sometimes. I don't know if we are, they all know we're down here.

Clover did indicate times that she felt supported by her school colleagues she stated, "I think we have a good support system who's very appreciative. I think they do have a sense of our craziness. But I think in a small district, there's a lot of singletons, not just us. So, we're all in that same dog fight. With our time and our responsibilities." Clover also identified the challenges of responding to community requests for art displays and interactions. She explained,

I find some frustration sometimes being asked to…, you get spread a little thin being the only person or a singleton or two of us, if there is something in the community. Like a community member was opening the grocery store and wanted artwork on display. But so did our superintendent's office in the spring. And another community member, who owns a garage over at the town coffee shop, wanted the display changed over there. There's only so much, like two teachers, three teachers can do in a community, where if you're a bigger district, you can divide and conquer. And you know, the (art)work numbers are more, you have a higher volume of product, you know… so it's, there's that as far as, I think. The outreach piece is very challenging I find too.

When reflecting upon art show attendance at the school, Clover recalled a time when the gym and hallways were filled with people at art shows. She explained,

I think even since 2007. When I came up here and started participating in the art show here, it was so much bigger. I don't know, though, we were in the lobby for some of those years. And maybe it just seemed a bigger crowd, but I don't know, even some of the gym shows I remember just being so many more people. But that could be with the concerts and the music part of it also down (in numbers) too, I don't know.

She continued, "I don't want to blame it on COVID. But I feel like it has nosedived ever since. I don't know if life is too busy. If families are over extended, if it's a single-family dynamic, they can't get to everything. Even our open houses are rarely attended anymore." She identified that there is still a core group of students, parents, and friends that support the arts in the district. Yet, Clover struggled with identifying strong support from the community for the arts program or even school programming in general. She shared, "I don't feel like as a community, we're that engaged with anything across the board. Our numbers, even at some of the sporting events, I bet they would say the attendance is down. So, it's kind of a world where

things are a little bit more accessible from your home. You may not be inclined to get to the actual event. I don't know." As far as the community, Clover shared that there is "a nice little group of arts advocates in the village and in the town." This group, the Cowtown Arts Council, has been around for many years and at one time supported a local arts gallery where students could display their work and attend performances and classes. But during COVID the gallery shut down and not until recently did the arts council again reach out to the school to offer support again.

Student Art Opportunities Outside of School

When asked about opportunities for students to engage in art activities outside of school, Clover did not know of many such opportunities currently available in Cowtown. She noted, "We used to have a throwing studio, that left. So, I don't think students can really stay here. They'd have to probably explore other options outside of town, which makes it hard in a rural district, (we're) maybe 10 or 20 miles from those opportunities."

Personal Artmaking

Clover's room is filled with materials and projects the students are working on. She teaches many art forms including wood burning, felting and needle felting, tile work, stained glass, mixed media, armature figures, painting, drawing, printmaking, silk dying and batik, all forms of clay building and recently added wheel throwing to her offerings. The amount of time she spends out of school researching and developing lessons for her students so they may explore a vast array of art forms is evident in the lessons she teaches. She describes herself as a life-long learner who seeks out information that she can bring back to her classroom. Although she would not describe herself as a practicing artist, she is an active learner and art creator who uses her interpersonal skills to expand her arts knowledge base for teaching. For example, Clover sought out a neighbor who created stained glass to learn more about this art form so she could teach this to her creative crafts students. She learned of people in the community who use their alpaca fur for felting and made connections to bring this artform to her classroom. When asked about what she would ask for to help support her as a singleton teacher, Clover responded, "Well, I'd probably create my own little studio and work on some of my projects myself. I don't do, I wouldn't consider myself a working artist, teachers really aren't, I don't think, I don't know."

Challenges

When describing challenges, she encounters with her singleton art teaching experience, Clover lists time, schedule and curricular demands, communication and support, need for a sounding board for ideas and new information, meaningful professional development, and at times classroom structure and space were all challenges.

Time was a reoccurring theme in Clover's description of her teaching experience. Time to research curriculum materials, time to prepare for classes, time for budgeting, time to meet with other teachers, and shared planning time. Time to work with multiple levels of students

during one scheduled class time. Scheduling time to meet with department members around their busy after school schedules (their time). Time away from the classroom. Time to attend professional development. Time to fill in for missing substitute teachers. Time to reach out to the community. Time to advocate for your program. Time to display your students' work. Time to create your own art. Clover teaches three levels of general art (Art 7, Art 8, and Studio Art), three levels of ceramics (Ceramics I, II, and III), and a Creative Crafts course. Here she explained the demands of her schedule,

> So, like, the day, it can be utter chaos, you learn to work in that environment. We don't have, I don't, we're not just one teacher that teaches sixth, seven, eighth (grade) you know, and switches every 10 weeks. But some of those courses do switch for me. I have my 20-week classes, I have my 10-week classes, and I have my 40-week classes. And then, you know, thinking about the other logistics, you order for all that, you have to pay attention to your numbers, you have to pay attention to marking periods. And some of my headaches aren't even the same as other teachers' headaches.

Later she described the challenges of changing from one class to the next and not always having the communication and support she needed to address behavior issues. She explained,

> Oh my gosh, you have an eighth grader running out of your room. And then you have these amazing seniors who come in next period, and you're exacerbated, or exhausted from, you know, what you have just dealt with. And yeah, those disciplinary things, and those are the hard parts where you're not always finding the support. They may support the arts, it's the other pieces that we're not involved with. Some of the team meetings, to know that you're going to have a runner or this boy's coming in with some very severe emotional challenge. We don't get a debrief, but yeah, we see them for 10 weeks, and then they're gone. So, you're just expected to cope.

Because of the number of courses Clover is expected to teach there is little to no flexibility in her schedule. This impacts the number of students who can take art electives and puts additional pressure on the art program and Clover's workload, forcing her to advocate for her courses and her students. When developing her lessons and curriculum materials over the years, Clover has had to do most of the research and development herself, particularly for courses she alone taught. Courses such as seventh grade art, ceramics, and creative crafts were all courses she had to develop on her own. Fortunately for some of her other courses, over the years, she had a mentor and partner teachers to work with on lesson ideas and curriculum planning. She explained,

> I do have a sense of partner teacher, but singleton wise, I don't know, like for clay, I am the only one who teaches that course. I seek out things online, I look at other teachers' work, what they're doing in introductory

classes. I don't know as though I know a different way. I've never had a
group to work with. I don't know as though I really could articulate (these)
challenges. Not having the sounding board has probably been the hardest
part.

She also describes the challenges of being a singleton in a schools-wide professional development setting. She explained, "I'm thinking of sometimes professional development days, those are days where sometimes we don't feel like we fit into what may be asked of us, because we may not have the group setting that would lend itself to those, almost think tank situations. So, we kind of just settle in like sand in some of the cracks of, of our building. Good or bad."

Clover identified that before the recent building renovation, classroom structure and space were a challenge to her teaching environment. Because she was assigned to a former Family and Consumer Science classroom when she first moved to the high school building, she was limited on the kinds of projects she could do with her students. Her new, renovated art classroom has more space for her ceramics program to grow and with the building project she was able to get two ceramic wheels to add to her equipment. Even with the new classroom renovation, Clover described not having tables specifically for clay building and having to teach multiple art forms using the same seating space. She may have a clay building class one period and then have to clean the tables for a Studio Art drawing lesson the next. Managing materials and cleanup is difficult when you do not have designated workspaces for materials such as clay.

Clover also described "sub guilt" as a con or "small school syndrome type of issue." Clover described that she finds it difficult to leave her classroom in the hands of a substitute teacher. Additionally, it is difficult for her to ask for a sub when she feels that the district will not be able to provide one or change their mind at the last minute because they cannot get coverage for another teacher. She also described a common occurrence of fellow district teachers having to give up their planning time or switch duties to cover for an absence due to the lack of sub availability.

Advantages of a Small District

Clover described several advantages of working as a singleton in a small rural district. First, she identified that she sees the ability to develop her own lessons and create her own curriculum for her courses as a pro rather than a con. She stated, "Sometimes it's a pro to me not a con that I get to develop my own path or direction with my choices, because the vehicle I take, as long as I'm hitting the standards, it's a little bit easier. Or it's a little liberal." Clover has demonstrated her love for learning about new art forms and has challenged herself and her students over the years by integrating new materials and techniques throughout her courses.

The biggest advantage Clover identified in her teaching experience at Cowtown is her ability to really get to know all her students and touch so many lives. She explained,

I think I don't know any different. I think I've had a good career. If I retired this year, I would feel like you do touch so many more lives because you do have students from… I mean, I literally started in 2000 and when in '07 I came up here, those sixth graders, literally, I had for 12 years in some way, you know, we were housed under the same school. It was almost like that group, that was the 2013 graduating class, I'll never forget them. I mean, that those are experiences that you don't get to have in some of the bigger districts. But you know, you feel like it's rewarding, and you feel like you make a difference, and you, you'll probably be remembered in their life, you know, they don't just leave junior high and never see you again and you go about your life… And your colleagues, you do become a little bit of a family even though you don't see them (regularly). It feels like home. And it was enough. I knew when I got here, I didn't look for other employment really, you know, the grass might have been greener…I feel like I'm where I'm supposed to be.

Skills for Success

When asked to describe personal characteristics that helped Clover be successful in her singleton art teaching career, she stated, "Yeah, flexibility. Sense of humor, for sure. Organization is probably the biggest thing for me and I'm very good at that. Probably very type A about things. So, I think you have to also be assertive because you have to go to bat for yourself on some issues that no one else is facing." She continued, "I think you have to be a Jack of all trades. Like if you can't, you've got to be able to almost be an independent learner. To tackle a few things that might get thrown on your plate that you weren't expecting to teach or maybe even have a background in. You don't know from one minute…you're going over to teach sixth grade, and me being asked to come up when I was a K-6 teacher and teach a studio. You're just going to do it. I mean, you have to be intelligent and gritty."

Clover reflects on the challenges and how she needed to be adaptable and a critical thinker and problem-solver throughout her years. She explained,

I don't know if I could pinpoint things. I don't always know. If you don't have it, you don't miss it in a way. And my career has never, I did a year and a half in Clinton. And it was the same setting, there was just me K-6, there might have been a part time teacher and then a high school teacher. So, I never met with them. My first year and a half, I was very isolated. And just really leaning on my methods classes from SU and my workshops, and I was building the complete plane while I was flying it. And I think we all do that. I think you just have a few tools in your toolbox. You have a few projects in your tool belt, and you hopefully got some good experience management wise in your placements to know some of the fires, how to put them out. But I think your first ten years is in our field… oh my god, you don't know what's going to blow up, what's going to catch on fire, what's going to medically happen. So, you really have to be like a problem solver. And critical thinking comes into play.

Early in her description of why she wanted to pursue art as her career, Clover described her love of art history and exploring art forms and design. These skills reappear in her teaching story. From the development of elementary lessons that connect to artists and art forms to creating curriculum for a new Creative Crafts course at the high school. Clover has used her natural curiosity, interpersonal skills, and "do it yourself" attitude to explore and develop techniques and resources to share with her students. The list of responsibilities that Clover described in her story demonstrates her ability to tackle many tasks and persevere.

Wants

When asked what she wants or needs to improve her teaching experience, Clover suggested common planning time for collaboration with content peers. She stated, "Common planning time would be nice, carved out at some point. Even (with) our elementary, just the three of us in our specific district. I think they (the district) could work on staff days or back to school days, where it could lend itself to the professional time we need to talk together about our scope and sequence." She also described "unencumbered time" where you could "reinvent" curriculum.

She described being encouraged to go to professional development. She stated, "I would love to have paid PD. Like, I would just feel, I would love to be encouraged to go." She remarked, "I would love some kind of consortium or catalog or something to even see exemplars of work. I could understand it better." She continued,

> Yeah, I don't, I don't even know what would help me because I've not really felt like, I don't feel like there's been help with that ever. For me. I've just been so consumed with my workday and my schedule and my classes and what I'm teaching and, and it's effective, but is it exciting? Does it evolve? I don't know. I honestly don't know what my options would be.

Clover added that she would like to have opportunities for her students such as visiting artists or art opportunities in the community and the time and resources to help make those things happen.

Summary

Clover grew up in a community larger than Cowtown where she now works. Being in a larger school she was exposed to a variety of art courses. Although she was neither encouraged nor discouraged to pursue art after graduation, in high school she identified that she enjoyed art and that it was "something I am good at". Clover also noted that she has positive role models in her high school experience such as her coaches and a beloved history teacher. Her path following high school graduation allowed her to explore different art majors in college and work opportunities and a trip to Europe solidified her desire to pursue Art Education as a career.

Clover's job search led her to a position at Cowtown Central School District where she taught kindergarten through sixth grade art for seven years and then moved to the junior senior high school to teach seventh and eighth grade art, ninth grade Studio Art and Creative Crafts, and Ceramics I, II, and III. Clover has taught in the Cowtown district for twenty-four years. Clover's additional teaching responsibilities and duties include being department chair, club advisor, coach, and study hall and homeroom teacher. Art related responsibilities include budgeting and ordering of materials, maintaining equipment, curriculum development, grading, preparing for art displays and shows, classroom management, organizing and planning art field trips, and community outreach to name a few.

Clover identified time, curriculum demands, many tasks and teaching responsibilities related to art learning and curriculum development and display, school and community outreach demands, and scheduling limitations as some of the challenges of being a singleton art teacher in a small rural district. She also identified the following needs: singleton friendly professional development, appropriate teaching workspace and classroom set-up, collegial interaction with art colleagues, common planning time with art colleagues, and access to art resources such as visiting artists, and art focused professional development.

In terms of school and community support, Clover described instances of feeling both supported and not supported by her school administration and community. In general, Clover described Cowtown as a supportive school and community. Throughout her career Clover experienced instances when the district and community supported the art program and Clover's role as art educator. Specifically, when Clover moved to the Jr/Sr high school the district bought a kiln and slab roller for her to start a ceramic program. Community organizations and business have reached out to the art department to offer space to display student work and create special community focused art exhibits.

When discussing support in terms of curriculum and program development, Clover identified that the district has mostly left this work for Clover to manage on her own. Although Clover has had some assistance with curriculum from her content peers over the years, when it came to restructuring of the seventh and eighth grade courses, new course development, and a recent district wide curriculum alignment initiative, Clover has been essentially on her own to research and align the courses she teaches. Additionally, a substitute teacher shortage and the anxiety of leaving the classroom in the hands of a non-art substitute teacher or school colleague make it difficult for Clover to ask for time off to attend professional development offerings. She expressed concerns both with being denied the time due to the sub situation and with the loss of work time for her students when she is away.

Characteristics and skills Clover identified as part of her singleton experience include isolation, flexibility, perseverance, love of learning, sense of humor, organization, assertiveness, gritty, intelligent, problem-solving, critical thinking, Jack of all trades, and an ability do it yourself.

Advantages Clover described as part of her singleton teaching experience, include the feeling of enthusiasm and partnership she felt those first seven years at the elementary school. When asked to make the choice to move to the Jr/Sr high school, Clover had this experience to lean on as she made her transition into a new position. She commented that at first, she was unhappy with being forced to change, but looking back identified that change as "a blessing I didn't know I needed at the time." Clover described enjoying the freedom to develop her lessons and courses. She described her experience at Cowtown as "feeling like home" and her colleagues as "feeling like a family". She remarked on how she can see the students grow over the years and how she feels pride in being a part of their experience. Ultimately, she stated, "I feel like I'm where I'm supposed to be."

Michael's Story ~ Eagleton Central School

Teacher Background Demographics

Michael (pseudonym) is an elementary visual arts teacher at Eagleton Central School District (pseudonym) which serves 303 students in grades kindergarten through twelfth grade (data.nysed.gov). Eagleton Central School is in the rural town of Eagleton (pseudonym) and is a Pre-K through twelve building with a separate structure that houses the music department. Michael has taught elementary art at Eagleton for eleven years. There is one other visual arts teacher in the district who teaches seven through twelfth grade and has been teaching in the district for thirty-four years.

Before teaching at Eagleton Central School, Michael taught at a private learning center and then elementary art for OCM BOCES (Onondaga, Cortland, Madison, Boards of Cooperative Educational Services) part-time sharing appointments at a neighboring city school and Eagleton. She explained how she "landed" at Eagleton stating "So, when the OCM BOCES contract was eliminated, I came to Eagleton, and I was point five for two years then point seven-five and then I got full time in 2016. So full time. So, this is my eighth-year full time."

For her first seven years at Eagleton, she commuted forty-six miles one way from her home to school. She stated, "Once I realized this was gonna be my spot, I picked up my whole family and moved to Hawkton (pseudonym)," a neighboring town. Her new home is 10 miles from Eagleton. The community where she now lives is like Eagleton in that it is a rural farm community, however, the local school district is about twice the size.

When asked about her personal history growing up, she stated, "My dad was in the military. So, I moved around a lot. I went to five different elementary schools. I was in Florida and Georgia. And then we settled when he was stationed in Fort Drum. My parents then divorced, we settled in Liverpool, then I went to ESM. So, I guess I'm used to a larger population, like, where I grew up in large population center and then moved to Maryland, and that was a very large district." Michael then moved again and graduated from Potsdam Central School "which was a little bigger than Eagleton." She noted, "I've had a big range of large, medium, to very small (school experiences)." Here she described her upbringing and path towards teaching art,

> I always loved art as a child, my grandmother had this sunroom. And I remember just always gravitating towards her easels and pastel kits and just being, like mesmerized. And just working alongside her. And I think that time with her really led me to that pathway because as I went into school, I took every art class I could take. And that really was my pathway from middle school once you can start picking electives. So, I think she was my biggest inspiration. So then when I graduated from Potsdam, I might have only been there for a year, I graduated with 55-60 kids, so not big, big. There're four colleges in a small, like, ten-mile radius. So, it was very cultural, I really liked it up there. And I thought, well, what am I

going to do with an arts background? So, then I ended up staying there (in Potsdam) for seven years, got my degrees and my masters. (SUNY) Potsdam, I think, really shaped who I became as an artist and an art teacher. …at first, I didn't know, you know, if I would leave and do something in the arts field, like a curator or even if I had big aspirations of…I wanted to be in movies and casting director and stuff. And then I was like, okay, that's, that's getting a little bit out of out of my field. My counselor, the lady who was guiding me, she sat me down and she said, well, you know, you're in your second year at (SUNY) Potsdam, and we really got to start getting you into focus of what you're gonna do next year and she said, have you ever thought about teaching art? I said no, I guess I didn't really think about that. She told me to try out some camp jobs over the summer working with kids and she kind of got me on my pathway to art education.

When asked about other art influences Michael identified,

My grandparents. We spent a lot of time with my grandparents. So, my parents divorced, and my dad remarried, and my ex-stepmother's mother was very present. And she took us to Ottawa to the museums. She was just always doing something; she was from Potsdam. So, she was always doing something with us that was meaningful. She was head of the exchange program at Clarkson. So, we were always with, you know, college students and doing different things. And she always had people over to her house. Her house was filled with artifacts, and every inch of every wall had a painting on it. So, I think she was another big part of my story. My mother and father provided a lot of opportunities for us. My mom took us to the theater and things like that. We were always out and about. She was a ski patroller, and we didn't sit at home. And my dad, we were always traveling as well. So, my dad was in Fort Drum and then Buffalo and then Potsdam. And so just a lot of different experiences and getting out there, I think. And then having stepbrothers and half-brother. And then all of these different family connections, doing different things and vacationing and I think that kind of opened my eyes to the world around me.

Michael earned her bachelor's degree in art education from the State University of New York (SUNY) at Potsdam. She explained,

They have early childhood education, but they have a deal with St. Lawrence, where SUNY Potsdam was sending all of their art ed kids to St. Lawrence and St. Lawrence was sending all their early elementary education students to Potsdam. So, my degree is from SUNY Potsdam, but I took all of my art education courses at St. Lawrence. And did all my students teaching and everything through there. And then I did my student teaching up there in Canton, which is similar to Potsdam School District, and I loved it. So, that was the hook. And I was only twenty-one. So, it's like this. This is, this is awesome. This, I could do this for the rest of my life.

When asked about her student teaching placements, she continued, "I actually was able to stay at Canton because my mentor teacher was 5th through 12th grade. So, I was able to get my elementary (placement) with the fifth and sixth (grades), and then my upper grade levels with him as well. So, I stayed with him through the whole time. I went in and observed the elementary teacher. Ideally, I probably should have had more of an elementary-secondary experience."

When asked, going back to your student teaching, in your courses that you took during your pre-service training, did you have any instruction in working in a small district or anything related specifically to working with rural learners? Or rural communities? She responded,

> Um, yes, I feel like they did a little bit because we were in Canton, New York. So, a lot of the districts, if we were student teaching locally, it was pretty rural. But they obviously allowed kids to go back to their, like, homes and student teach back there. So, a lot of kids were going back to Long Island so we would carry those experiences as well. And they were very different. So it was, and maybe, maybe that's why I always leaned towards going into a rural district. Because they would say, you know, the horror stories of having forty-eight, you know, kindergarteners at once. But I wouldn't say specifically, they, it was kind of more general population. They didn't really spend a lot of time on it. I don't remember anything about small districts or rural districts in general.

Michael shared how she began her career working for OCM BOCES splitting her time between Cortland and Eagleton at three different schools. She explained her experience when she began teaching at Eagleton,

> I was only there one day a week in the mornings, but Eagleton is different. Here. You can know everybody, like, they really care about each other. I felt like people, even though I was some kid from Syracuse, and I was out in a temporary building behind the school, so I barely saw anybody, I felt like people cared. And when I would come in and have conversations, and people would stop out, they genuinely wanted to help. Eagleton is very much, like, the school is the heart of the community. Everyone really rallied around the school, it's a big, we all call it a family. So, I guess being in Potsdam, and moving around so much as a kid, I never really had that sense of family at a school. So maybe that's what kind of drew me in when I came here. And when I had the opportunity to interview here and at the other district, I interviewed here, I didn't even take the other interview, because I didn't feel that sense of that tight knit community…

Teaching Environment

According to census data, Eagleton School District is identified as Rural (42) Distant with a community population of 2,442 +/- 284 residents (Census.gov). There is one other visual arts teacher in the district who teaches seven through twelfth grade. The district's K-12 building is organized to house the Jr/Sr high students separate from the elementary students. The Jr/Sr

high art teacher's room is located on the second floor away from Michael's current classroom. Michael explained the classroom situation over the years,

> When I started at Eagleton the classroom was outside the main building. It was in a temporary, modular, I guess. It was about twenty feet outside of our elementary wing. So, kids had to go outside and into this, this modular building. It was a great space, it was huge. But yeah, (I) wouldn't see anybody, like nobody would know if we were dancing on tables (laughs). So yeah, they just put me out there. And I was out there for two years, and then they moved me over to another, we had a house. That was a temporary space. And they put me over there because the elementary art program here had always been an itinerant position up until that point.

Later the district moved Michael into the main building where she shared a room with the home and careers teacher. She explained,

> So, they did a capital project. And I was still an itinerant. So, I was not included in the meetings. They thought, well, our art teacher is an itinerant and our home and careers teacher is an itinerant, so, let's make them a shared space where, ideally, one would be in the morning, one would teach in the afternoon. Never worked out that way. They couldn't schedule it, so we were flip flopping every other period. So, this is what they built. Basically, it is a kitchen lab and a kitchen lab (pointing to each end of the room). Kitchen cabinets. So, they never had conversations with me about what that might look like. The high school art teacher was involved a little bit, but it really was just the contractors making these decisions with what they had available, because this was a computer lab before they knocked the wall down and tried to make it a shared space. So then, we shared, and it was horrendous. A music teacher also pushed in in a free period. So, he would roll in with the piano. We couldn't fit our desks. Like we were standing. I had a little setup over on the counter. The home and careers teacher was over here somewhere (points to a corner of the room). You know, we never had planning periods because there were always classes, and I would go over to the library. That was three years. And then the home and careers teacher did a big campaign to basically get me out of here. But I was on board because I wanted to get full time and there was no way I could do full time in a shared space. So, we kind of campaigned to get me moved out of here because there was… and it caused a lot of upset people and some stress because moving any materials upstairs was kind of taboo. They didn't want the elementary (students) to have to go upstairs.

Michael continued to describe the move upstairs. She explained,

Yeah. And there was no sink. But with all of the negatives, still having my own space and being able, because I wouldn't have any of this (she gestures to the room we are in), I wouldn't have had centers. Everything was in bins that I had to take. It was almost like being on a cart but with tables. So, I moved up to a corner middle-school room where the elementary students would come up the stairs and they would go right into the corner room because that was the only way they agreed to it. They put in one little sink underneath the cabinet for me where the kids had to duck their heads to use. It was a good-sized room and that was the big positive, that it was a big room. So, I was up there for four years, and I got used to being up there. We have air conditioning up there. Did okay with the one sink. We had a girl's restroom right across the hall. So anytime we were doing ceramics or papier Mache or something you know, I'd send them over there to use the sinks if needed. Or back to their classrooms. But the sink was an issue for sure.

After two years the state changed the home and careers requirement, and the previous art/home and careers classroom was then used as a health classroom. Michael was in the process of getting a kiln for the art program and the logistics for installation and venting helped Michael get her previous room back, all to herself. She explained, "So when I was trying to get the kiln, we had to do all this structural planning, and this was really the only logical place that it could go. So that was a big help with getting this room back. So, this is my second year back in here." When asked how the space is functioning now, as her own classroom, she stated,

Pretty good. I mean, the cabinets, you know, are not arts friendly. I wouldn't even say student friendly. But then on the other hand, it's nice to have cabinets. Because upstairs I didn't. I just had an open bookshelf kind of thing. So, they're small and they're shallow. Some of them don't close all the way because stuff's still sticking out all over the place. Yeah. But it's definitely better than I've ever had. It is the best setup I've had, that I've been able to work with to create my kind of ideal studio where kids can have a ceramic center, a collage center or paint center, drawing, printmaking. I was never able to do that upstairs because it was just a square. With no furniture.

Michael also has some large item storage space in the basement of the building. The classroom entrance is at one end of the space where you enter the first "kitchen set-up" area. To the left there are upper and lower kitchen cabinets that lead to the outer facing wall that has windows above and counter cabinets below. The wall on the window side opens to areas without cabinets where the heating units are located and in the middle area the kiln is placed where a washer and dryer once was located near a vent and electrical outlet. The wall continues around towards the other end of the classroom where the second "kitchen set-up" is located. This area also includes upper and lower cabinets with counters and cutout spaces where the stoves and refrigerators were once located. The end wall is wrapped around with more counter space and a jut-out area that drops back into a wall display area with some additional cabinetry and a place to put the Promethean board. In front of the Promethean board, Michael has placed a carpet with

bright-colored circles where the "littles" can gather for instruction. The center of the room is filled with tables and chairs pushed together to create three distinct work areas. The kitchen areas are set up as stations with a painting area, clay area, and various drawing and making materials.

Michael's classroom is set up with choice-based learning in mind. She has been working towards adding more choice and self-directed learning to her curriculum, therefore the space reflects this model of teaching and learning although the space has some challenges. She explains,

> There is a lot of quirky stuff in this room. Like the Promethean board is not in an ideal space. Ideally, I would have tables out in the centers more like workspaces, but the Promethean board is there right now (points to the board), and I need them all to be able to see it. So, they still have to do a traditional sense (gathering) when they come in, they go to their home base. And I'd like to move away from that. But I'm limited to all of the cords and hookups being right there (points to corner by the jut out). It's also like, this thing (desk) is in so many different places, because there's no outlets right over here. And then there's some up in the kitchen spaces. So ideally, they would have done it a little differently. Just a weird shape room, I guess, a rectangle. But it's a lot of stuff.

Despite the "quirks" Michael likes the space better than the other options and hopes that improvements can be made over time.

Scheduling

Michael described her transition from point-five to full-time at Eagleton. She stated,

> So, I was 50% here. So, they hired me for that point five. And they said, we know this isn't ideal. We would like to add sixth grade, you know, in the future. But at that time, I had had my son who was a baby, one maybe. So, I said, you know what, this is fine. This is good. So, they worked with me that first year, I only worked every other day, which was nice, because I only had to come out here a full day, had a day off…then it changed to half a day every day. So, then it kind of got to the point where I was commuting from Syracuse and then Baldwinsville for years and years. And I started interviewing at other places. And I did use the admin. at that time as a reference. And I don't know if that had anything to do with it. But I was vocal about you know, needing to figure out my 403 B and start, you know, getting full time so I could start my tenure track…. So, the superintendent had the business, our business admin, do up some numbers say okay, we're paying Michael to stay here and sub every day and how much would it be if we just put her on as full time, and it was only like a $5,000 difference a year. So, that's ultimately how I got full time. And my art position was still point-seven-five. But they hired me as a full-time art teacher, that point two-five was a different duty every year until I built the program, to where it is.

She now has, "two full teaching days. And then I have two lighter teaching days, because I teach fifteen elementary sections, because our population is getting so small that Pre-K went to one section this year. So that makes my schedule a little lighter." Eagleton School District graduates 22-30 students each year. Michael reports her class size to be no more than fifteen students with two sections of each grade level kindergarten through sixth grade and one section of Pre-K. She filled out her schedule with an art elective offering that students can sign up for and helps facilitate test modification support services. She explained how her schedule has evolved, "As the years went on, it filled up more and more, we added sixth grade, we added an art elective. I had to fight for the grade level shared time, because I was never able to go to these grade level department meetings. Because I have sixth grade, I was able to get that in my schedule. Pre-K through five I see them once every four days, sixth grade, I see them once every other day. And I alternate with health, library and music."

Michael described her classroom set-up and how students use the space,

We do PBIS (Positive Behavior Intervention Strategies) here. So, we're respectful, responsible, and safe. So, I teach them that Mona Lisa is a respectful, responsible, safe art student ready to start and participate. So, littles start on the rug. And we do like a five-minute mini lesson. Whether it's Visual Thinking Strategies, or children's literature, some type of sketchbook prompt for the older kids. But just kind of to have a routine we come in, we meet, check in, go over our objectives and goals and maybe a little demo. And then we have studio time. And then we clean up and then we try our best to have some reflection time.

Access

Michael's room is located off the main hallway near the public access to the building. Eagleton is a Pre-k through twelve two-story building and houses elementary classrooms and common areas such as the library, gyms, and cafeteria on the first floor. The middle school classrooms are in another part of the building and the Jr/Sr high school grades are on the second floor. Michael explained, "The elementary (students) come through here(hallway) to go to the library and to the small gym, and to the cafeteria. But other than that, the elementary wing is separated. So, I'm right in the right in the middle of things across from the library and small gym. So, kind of right in the center of it all." She identified that "Music is across the parking lot in the annex. They built that space for music. So, it's a really nice space, really nice band room. They have lots of little offices and practice rooms, and then the chorus room. So, when they decided to dedicate that to the annex, they built it for the music program." Michael mentors the new young music teacher. She noted,

Yeah, so they're really out on their island over there. They don't see many adults. And that's really how I relate to my mentees. In my first year here, I was out on that island in a temporary where I didn't see anyone. She's really good at making it a point to come over every day. I try to get over there as much as I can. The

transition for kids is hard. They have to walk across the parking lot. They have three-minute transitions. So, trying to help her with that classroom management wise with them running across and trying to establish a routine for them coming in and meeting them at the door and things like that.

The other art teacher's room is on the second floor in the high school portion of the building. Michael describes how her new space makes her feel more supported and accessible; however it has advantages and disadvantages. She explained,

Yeah, I definitely have more support, being in the building, and even being out of the corner. I felt like when I was in the corner (upstairs), I didn't even see the teacher that was one classroom down on the other side of the stairwell. Like we never saw each other. It was wild. So, being here, I'm definitely more in the mix of the student population and more teachers stopping by or just walking by and popping in. And that's kind of a negative I think sometimes because I'll be like, you know, I've limited prep time and we're always so busy and I don't have time to chit chat.

Michael also described how classroom teachers often send their students to specials with their teaching assistants making her interactions with teachers less frequent. She commented, "…we're such a small district, and to not see a teacher, a classroom teacher, all year long, it boggles my mind." Michael explained how she doesn't have very much time to interact with her singleton colleagues, but they still try to support one another.

We all have such different schedules, our, our departments, that's, that's really one of our downfalls is we don't have common time. Like the PE teacher, basically, we're opposite each other. So, if I have a class, they have a class. If she has a PE class, it's my prep, because that's just how the schedule works. So, we see each other at these department meetings once a month, okay, or just in passing. But we do try to work together, we do some cross curricular projects, and we got T-shirts made. We call ourselves the Special Forces and we have a little logo and we do pretty well.

When asked if she had time to interact with her colleagues, Michael responded,

Our department does not have common time but yes, I do see them often as mentor to the new music teacher and part of drama club. I also do an after-school art club with my co-worker who is the HS art teacher. For the last two years I have been able to join grade level and 'dept' meetings during our contractual team meeting time connected to our lunch break. I get nervous that it could be different every year, as there is always a chance the admin needs to fit an elementary class in during that time. I'd say we meet to discuss program needs once a year. Every year we say the same thing, we need to advocate and get the same time as other departments.

She also described how the dynamic between veteran teachers and new faculty coming in can be challenging. Michael relates to her mentee's struggles with navigating singleton-ness and the challenges and excitement of a new teaching assignment. She explained,

> It's interesting. There's a very different dynamic. We have two veteran teachers in our arts department, one who's been here for 34 years, another who's been here for 20 something years. So, having a new 22-year-old music teacher, we've had a lot of turnover in this music position too. They're (new teacher) kind of frustrated, you know, they (veterans) like things the way, you know, they're very traditional, and the way things have been and it's hard for them to see a 22-year-old come in and shake things up. And then I'm kind of in the middle because, you know, I listened to them and, and their concerns and their opinions and then trying to support her as her mentor. And all of her excitement.

When asked about student access to her art classroom, Michael referred to her new arts elective class creating an opportunity for students to have access to the art room outside of their regular class setting, however, the program is more "academic" focused. She explained, "Yeah, so the art elective gets the elementary population in more often. And I have my little loyal following. They do little video skits, and be little news reporters and photographers and things, but they have to brainstorm, and they have to mind map. And they have to write rough drafts and things. And so, I see them every day ninth period. In a smaller group, because it is a recess. So, it is voluntary, but they get so excited. Is it our elective today." The school also supports a "help a teacher" program as part of their PBIS. She explained, "So, kids come and help. We schedule that. For sixth grade, I do study hall sign outs. So, they sign out and they come down here and basically, it's extra studio time. Kids that want to do work." Michael is also active with the drama program and summer arts learning program which creates time for her to interact with students, other colleagues, and the community at different times throughout the year. Michael presents three art shows throughout the year providing another opportunity for access to students, faculty, and community members.

Student Art Opportunities Outside of School

When asked about art opportunities for her students outside of school Michael described an afterschool program that is facilitated by both teachers and parents/community members. She explained,

> We have parents that come in, one is doing theater, a little theater after school program. In town do we have our director at the library. She is very like crafty though, like here's your cotton balls for a plate kind of thing. But she supports an arts and crafts story hour. We have (had) a summer program, but I think the COVID funds are running out. Each summer we've been doing an art, a big arts and musical kind of thing just with the summer camp kids and basically, we're

making like a whole set and gallery around this production. So last year, we just
had the kids brainstorm. And we did this like across the USA road trip kind of
thing where they sang different songs from John Denver and *Country Roads Take
Me Home* and had artwork from all different cultures and things. So, we've been
doing that the last couple years in the summer, which the kids have really
enjoyed. There's lots of other camps and things that kids attend as well. But I'd
say the school was really their resource where all those things happen.

Michael was not aware of any other art focused opportunities for students in the community.

Budget

When describing her classroom budget, Michael indicated that it has been "a roller
coaster throughout the years." When she started the budget was nearly twice what it currently is.
She described how "it just ticked down each year" until recently, with the addition of the kiln,
she was able to get the district to agree to adding money to the budget to build up resources to
support this new art form. She described how she has learned to advocate for what she needs,
"And I've always gotten the hand me down tables. But then, you know, I just had to ask really.
Well, what about some chairs? And yeah, go ahead put in for some chairs. Now I'm doing this
Rocket Scoop that, you know, and they're like little reporters, and you know, what about like a
little U-shaped table." She described scavenging for materials and then learning how to advocate
for what she needed. She explained, "Usually I would go down in the basement and drag up
whatever I could find. So, I feel like after about ten years or so I was able to, I kind of had earned
my place and being able to order some of my own stuff. Because before that I had just had
whatever. It was mismatched chairs, metal, they would shock the kids. A little preschoolers
couldn't reach up to the table." She continued, "So every year I just tried to add a little piece to
make it better for the kids in the program. Instead of just kind of sitting back and saying, oh,
we'll just take what we can find." Michael described a recent superintendent who had an arts
background who was very supportive of her building resources for her program and helped
facilitate getting the district a kiln and clay cart and her move back into her current classroom.

Curriculum

Michael has a master's degree in curriculum and instruction, so she is very curriculum
minded when it comes to preparing learning experiences for her students. When she started at
Eagleton, she noted, "There was nothing. There was no binder, there was no (new) New York
State Standards to reference, there wasn't much." She noted that she has "always had the lead
role in establishing my curriculum." She recalled getting her first "curriculum kit" from
OCMBOCES and "Then I just, each year, built it. Built it little by little."

Michael explained how she taught herself the new N.Y.S. Visual Arts Learning
Standards, "When the standards came out for a couple years, I blew it up and I just kept it on my
desk, like one of those big calendar maps. So, it was right under my laptop, so every time (I can

look at it) and that's how I taught myself the standards. I just, okay, my second graders are coming in, this is what we're doing, you know, how, how am I gonna relate this to the new standards and kind of was able to lose some pieces that were totally not meeting the standards and, and then add, add some things that that were more meaningful." She continued, "So, I had to basically develop all of my own assessment tools. When my observations would roll around, my administrators, they would even say, I'm gonna be honest with you, I don't know anything about this kind of stuff. And they would kind of push the rubrics aside."

Michael had to advocate for curriculum time and ask for resources and help. She recalled, "I developed my own curriculum; I was actually paid in curriculum hours because I was outspoken about how much work it was to do that when I first got here and not have any resources. So about five years ago, my district purchased the Art of Education membership for me, and that's pretty much my go to, but I pull from all kinds of places. I pull from Facebook groups. I pull from, you know, the Arts Leadership group and the Madison County PLC (professional learning community) that I participate in too."

Michael described how not having support for her art curriculum development caused her to sometimes feel "insecure." She explained, "Yeah, because sometimes I'll get insecure and say, you know, am I doing a good job? Am I doing enough? Am I doing too much? And with different administrators? It's been different answers every time." She described a time when the district had an "arts person" for a superintendent stating,

> So, when the previous superintendent came in, he was definitely more interested in what we did. For so long, we haven't done (arts) curriculum here in so long. If I were to pull out paper copies of curriculum from when I first started, I would cringe. Our professional development has been a lot focused on reading initiatives like Wonders, so I have to sit in on a lot of literacy. We've been focused on SEL trauma-based behaviors and supporting kids' behavior. But I feel like we have not had a (arts) curriculum initiative. Other subjects have. And I think because I attend so many professional developments. Like I'm part of the one in Madison and then the Arts Leadership at OCM BOCES and then I was going to the annual one at NYSATA, I think they just trusted that I was doing much more than, than I really needed to. And that was kind of the feedback that I was getting. Oh, that's great. Everything's great.

Michael explained how nice it was to have an administrator who had a background arts education to talk with. She explained,

> It was nice to have somebody to talk to, and, and check in with and he (her previous superintendent) would always after every Arts Leadership Day, which he would even attend sometimes, we would talk about it and he would say, you know, well, how are you feeling about this? And, you know, he knows the other art teacher very well. So how are we going to get him on board with things?

Because a lot of the things are high school appropriate and not elementary. So, I would say, you know, I would get frustrated sometimes and say well, there's nothing I can do if he isn't willing to, there's nothing I can do. And my superintendent would say, you know, stick with this. You can do this. You're gonna get there slowly, but surely.

Michael referred to other resources she uses to develop her curriculum such as Facebook groups, TAB Facebook page, Teachers Pay Teachers, reading materials on topics that she is interested in such as "lately, I'd say over the last five, five years or so I've been reading a lot about choice and TAB and that's kind of been my focus." She has also attended professional development training through OCM and MOBOCES and conferences offered through NYSATA.

Michael described interactions with classroom teachers and reaching out to collaborate on co-curricular project-based learning. She explained, "So, I've always been open to working with grade level teachers and doing project-based learning and things like that. And I feel like they have their projects, they have their curriculums, like they're not super interested, just so when I would seek out or email and say, hey, you know, what, how can I support, you know, your curriculum, Social Studies, Science, Math. They weren't super receptive to it."

She recalled a lesson she developed to support fourth grade curriculum learning about New York State. She explained, "In fourth grade now, we do landscapes, I teach them space, and it can be imaginary or realistic landscape, based on a real experience or memory, some of our kids never even leave Eagleton. So, I have to kind of open it some to more imaginary places, but your favorite, your favorite place in New York State. And we look at all of these different landscapes within New York State. And when something like that is out in the hallway, presented, they (teachers) are like, oh, it's amazing. You know, it gets lots and lots of compliments, but never like, hey, let's meet and let's figure out how you could support this learning?"

She continued to describe how sometimes teachers do not understand that art has its own set of state standards and objectives. She explained,

But I think a couple of teachers are a little standoffish because they are so product focused, that they know that I'm not going to do, you know, everybody needs to draw, you know, Niagara Falls. So, I feel they're very, like craft (focuses). They think it's arts inclusion, but it's, it's kind of the opposite. Or they'll ask me to do things, and I will I know, I have boundaries with now. And I'll say, no, absolutely not. I'm not doing that. I have a curriculum, I can't just, you know, have them do that in my class, I can't fit that in. And then they kind of get a little bit like, what, wait a second, like, you know, its art class, why can't you? Why can't you fit this in?

Support

When asked about collegial support, Michael's responses were mixed. She described her art colleague as being emotionally supportive despite having no interest in working with her to develop curriculum. She stated,

> We do have a great relationship. He, I call him the relationship guru. Whereas I'm so curriculum focused and, you know, really focused on what good teaching looks like, he has such good relationships with the kids, that I wish I could be that calm, cool and collected. I wish I wasn't stressed out all the time. So, it's like, I look at him, and I admire him. And he does have this rapport with the kids that is so natural. And, and I've really learned, learned to manage middle school through his guidance."

When it comes to curriculum, she noted that her veteran art colleagues have little interest in the Individual Arts Assessment Pathway (IAAP) or other arts curriculum development initiatives. She stated, "Yeah. He's like, no, I don't get paid enough for that. So that's where we kind of hit a wall with the Arts Leadership thing. I was coming back, and I was getting so frustrated with bringing this information to them and they didn't want to, they didn't want to hear it."

Michael described her relationship with the other "special area" teachers. She explained, "Um, it's hard, we definitely feel like we don't have that camaraderie like the grade level teachers do. Because you see these grade level teams, and they're so close, and they have such a tight knit bond. And even though we're only two sections, a grade, and their TA, they work together every day, all day. So, when you're by yourself, it's kind of more casual, like, yeah, how's it going? You know, we don't have time to go spend time with anybody really like that."

She described how during specials the singleton teachers do not have the same academic support for students with 504s and IEPs. She explained,

> You know, we don't have TA support. That's probably my biggest, biggest complaint. Being a singleton is just, just no support. And I've tried to advocate you know, in some of these meetings, even attending some kids 504 and IEP meetings, and asking why, why are they not getting support an art class where they need to be able to create an artist statement as a state standard and it's always, you know, bottom of the totem pole kind of thing. We really wish we could support you, but we just don't have anyone available. We really need them. You know, that's their break. So, our specials are aligned with TA's lunch breaks, okay, so they basically like drop them off, and then leave. Sometimes they go back and assist the teacher with, you know, their things they need to do in grading, working with the team things. And then sometimes, that's usually when their breaks are scheduled. So, it's just not a possibility unless a kiddo has a one to one.

Michael also described how the district has had a lot of turnovers in administration and how this affects her experiences with support. She explained,

> We've had a lot of turnovers in administration, like we have a new superintendent now, who is a data guy, so he when he first met with me, he said, 'You know, I'm a data guy. This is all great.' He came in and it was like a rainbow exploded in here. And he was like, okay, this looks like you're doing great stuff. But I guess, luckily, I've had support. I kind of feel sometimes, like I'm definitely not a priority. Like if I have a behavioral issue or a question. They're great, and they're kind, but I don't get the same treatment as the elementary teachers do. If there's an issue like, you know, getting that same level of respect or urgency that they get if I call, you know, for a student it's kind of like, well can they stay? Can you make it work? We don't have anybody right now.

Michael described how over the years she and her elementary principal have grown together, supported, and taught one another. She explained, "But my principal who's been here for about five years now. She's grown, like she seems more interested. Where at first, she was very much like this is too much for kindergarten kids, they can't, this too much vocabulary. That was kind of her feedback. And I'd be like, no, it's not. They do great. She was a kindergarten teacher prior. So, I think over the years I have kind of softened her to the art room model and how it's different. And she's helped me too with primary grades. I never was a sing-song person. And now I'm sing-songy (she laughs)."

Michael provided an example of how her principal can at times be a source of support for her when it comes to advocating for arts programming, especially now that the former arts focused superintendent and curriculum coordinator have left the district. She explained,

> So, I feel like I do have support when I have an issue like with being very frustrated with not being heard about the IAAP. I didn't want to be the only district that did not have an arts pathway. I want to do everything I can to help in that aspect. But I just, I can't overstep, I don't have the courses, and I'm not the high school art teacher. So, I can share those things with her. But I don't like to get into like the, the politics of it. So, it's a little tricky. Because I don't want to undermine anyone. So, I feel like I have to be conservative sometimes a bit with my own opinions and things just to kind of respect everybody's place and philosophies and that's kind of where I'm at now is kind of stuck in the middle. He's gonna retire, probably in a year or two. And then the music teacher is retiring in a year or two. So, it's kind of like this limbo.

Community Support

Michael described the Eagleton community as being "a family" and the school as being the "heart of the community." When asked to describe community support for her and her art

program, Michael stated, "I'd say there's a lot of support" and described how they support one another. She explained,

> Sure, yeah, it took time, but um, we do student donations to the PTO fundraiser every year. So, after many, many years of donating my time to making sure they had a lot of pieces to auction. They, they got me a Cricket, a Smart Cricket last year, which was really nice. And then they asked me, you know, do you need anything else for the Cricket, so then they got us, a t-shirt, press and support from the PTO is awesome, I get a lot of community shout outs for doing things like that. We do things for the library cards for troops. So, we work with them. So, yeah, a lot of community support. Arts Facebook page and Arts Instagram page, and, you know, a lot of our parents follow and support those.

When it came to community support for school events such as art shows, Michael described how it has evolved over time. She elaborated,

> So, (we) played around with different types of presentations of our shows and things. We had a winter festival, it was arts alone, the visual arts, and it was a little light. So, we paired up the arts departments. So now we do our art shows, connected with the concerts, and it is elbow to elbow, you can't walk through the halls, the parents, you know, are just overjoyed. And they are able to walk around and view the artwork before or after the concert. So, it's kind of a whole experience, an arts night, and we do those three times a year.

Michael is also "very involved in drama club" and described a recent incident where the community came out in support of the instrumental teacher and drama program director in a dispute over her choice for the spring production. She explained, "…the whole community showed up at the board meeting, hundreds of signatures on a petition to get the play that the director thought would be best for our kids (approved) versus a musical, because they (the board) were going to just bring in an outsider who didn't know the kids and things like that. So very supportive." She also described that being a small community, the community members are integrated in the school. She stated, "So, our parents are our music boosters, and they are, you know, they are class advisors. In some cases, they're substitutes. The school is really what brings our community together."

Michael also described an afterschool enrichment program that has been well supported by the community and local businesses that donate and allow artwork to be displayed. She explained,

> We just started after school enrichment a couple years ago, which has been great. I'm involved with an art club, and I've done different things each year like a clay club. We did this year; we're doing *creating for a cause* because our PTO donated

a Cricket for us. So, we're making things for their little auction. They're making T-shirts and things which they think is just so cool. And lots of support through the PTO. Sometimes I'll take stuff down to the local restaurant and hang stuff there, Shelley's in town. We basically have like, similar to Cowtown we have one main street, but like, condensed into one block. Sal's little pizzeria is always supporting us, you know, they donate to our cause. And you know, if we have any fundraisers or anything, parents always show up. Yeah, I'd say overall, I feel pretty supported.

Professional Development Support

When asked about district provided professional development, Michael shared that "We kind of joke when we see the schedule for that sort of professional development, they (her singleton colleagues) will be like, let's see if we're on it this year. And then we'll call each other and be like, guess who was left out of professional development planning?" She noted that special areas (singletons) often get "lumped into a lot of literacy stuff" and "over the years, we've kind of been left out." She added, "We try to plan our own PD when we are not considered on PD days. Sometimes we are allowed time to meet as a department, sometimes we are expected to do the district wide training."

Michael also identified that there are advantages to attending professional development with other content area teachers. She identified her concern for what she "would have never known." She stated, "You know, so say, I'm lumped into like a literacy workshop. It does help to know the curriculum, you know, in the grade levels. And that really helped me kind of develop my curriculum. Okay, so fourth grade, their new focus is all about New York State. So, I would have never known that if I hadn't attended some of these workshops. So, I could do so much with N.Y. State and my curriculum, fourth grade. So, I was just thinking I would have never known this, nobody would have ever shared this." Over the years Michael has asked to be included in grade level team meetings. She has been successful in getting this time added to her schedule for sixth grade.

Michael described how over the years she has been her own advocate for her professional development needs. She belongs to two BOCES supported learning communities and has attended several professional development offerings over the years seeking out information and support for her personal development, curriculum, and program. She explained, "I always have to seek those things out myself. Like, I'll say, hey, there's a webinar, Fred's is doing this webinar on IAAP, I'm gonna get a sub. So, they never bring that stuff to me, I always have to bring it to them. And they appreciate that they're like, oh, great, you know, you're at PD. And they always say that in my professional review, that I am always trying to improve professional learning and grow and things like that." Michael added how time and job demands have recently impacted her ability to participate in PD, she stated,

I haven't gone to the state NYSATA conference in a couple years, but I went in gosh, 2020. And then I feel like this year with, I've been mentoring the last few years and it's so much more work than I thought it would be, I feel like the last few years I've taken a little bit of a step back from professional development. But I was doing the Arts Leadership training, I go to Madison, MOBOCES, they do a monthly PLC. I was, how do they do this monthly? I would go twice a year or something. And even that was difficult for me to take two full days to go. But anytime I went, I was just in love and sick. I wish I could be there once a month. (It was arts focused?) Yeah. Very hands on. It's, you know, art teachers presenting. Very relevant, like take this now, do it tomorrow. So, I miss that. But hopefully, I'll get back in the swing of things here.

Michael described the challenges of attending out of district professional development. She shared this story of a colleague from another district, "Yeah, so some of the MOBOCES teachers I'm still in contact with. Heather was a big support for me for a long time. And she, it's funny, because she texted me since she just moved from one district to another as a high school art teacher to an elementary. And she was like, I totally get it. I totally get why you could not go to every PLC every month. She was like this is a lot of work."

Michael also described other difficulties with leaving her classroom to attend professional development offerings. She described,

Yeah, our sub list is, is very small, and we definitely do not get a certified sub. My day could even be pieced together, like with a cafeteria worker coming in and doing one class and then a TA coming and doing one class. So, it's very, it's gotten to the point where I can't leave anything that's, that's beyond like, paper and pencil. Unless I know who it is going to be. Things like that. I've gotten notes from subs, couldn't find this, this, this, and it's like, right on the table. I can't trust that a substitute can facilitate a lesson. And our principal shares these concerns. You know, we're not going to get our number one sub. You know, it's, it's really, it's been a struggle for a long time actually. I tried doing Google Classroom stuff, and anything with technology, it just it never, it never works in my favor. So, I've basically gone to sketchbook kind of things when I'm out. And I hate that because it's like my kids are missing out on their art experience that day. It's like a throwaway day. And then I used to leave these pages and pages of plans, and I really wanted them to have a meaningful experience while I was gone, and the sub would just do whatever they wanted anyway. Oh, I let them I let them paint, they wanted. They wanted to paint. So, I was like, oh my gosh, and I'd have dried brushes all over the place. So that's a problem. For sure. Being out means basically, the kids don't have an art experience for that day. And then I have to prepare six to seven different lessons for different grade levels. So, it really is, like when I have to be out, it is really, oh, my goodness, like this is so much work to be out. There's no one to help, you know, this person, they can't find the power button on the Promethean board. You know, they don't even, they don't seek anybody (out), they don't leave, the class might be there. So, they don't leave to

get help or anything like that. And they just have to do what they think is best. But yeah, being out, I have a lot of anxiety about that.

Teaching Philosophy

Michael's teaching philosophy has evolved over her years teaching elementary art at Eagleton Central School. She has worked to establish an approach to creativity and artmaking that she believes is the best fit for her Eagleton learners. She explained,

> So, it's definitely evolved. When I first started teaching, I was very focused on the product. And, you know, I would always get, I was too focused on the outcome and technique and skill because that's kind of how my art classes were. And what, you know, I thought that everyone was looking for was this, you know, immaculate product based on parent feedback and my experience in school. At the beginning, I wanted the perfect art show. I wanted the kids pumping out, you know, excellent exemplary artwork. And I was too worried about the product at the beginning, very focused on teacher directed lessons, and step by step technique and including vocabulary. My supervisor once observed one of my kindergarten lessons and he said that could have been a high school art lesson. He said there was so much vocabulary and so many steps and skills and goals with the kids that you had in one 40-minute period, that he's like, that expectation I might observe in high school. And so that made me really take a step (back). This was my first year. First year, so I guess that's pretty normal, but I had to kind of take a step back and reevaluate, and at that time, discipline based, we didn't have a lot of resources. So, you know, there wasn't any Pinterest or, or things like that. So, I was using books a lot to inspire my lessons and things like that. So then as time went on, getting to know the kids and their needs and Eagleton specifically, I realized that I'm not really meeting them where they're at. That that was just beyond what they needed for an art curriculum, or for an art experience. So, I started to really look at other philosophies. And little by little, I moved along the choice spectrum, and to where I'm at now. Pretty much, I think, a child is the artist, I call it their studio. So, I always say, okay, artists, this is your studio. I ask open ended questions I don't, my feedback is never well, it, you know, it should look like this, or did you use, you know, five values. And sometimes we do use criteria, but I've definitely done like a, a one-eighty, in my philosophy from the first year, until now, it's very different. So, I basically am an advocate now for choice-based curriculum. Where process over product, more about the artist experience, and giving them you know, because I had kids really fighting back. And I realized, you know, that power struggle, what are they getting out of it? Pretty much nothing. So, I really had to reexamine my curriculum and change it and mold it to the kids that I had in Eagleton.

When asked what she meant by the kids "fighting back," did she mean fighting back in the sense of them wanting to be more self-directed and them wanting to be able to choose more? She responded, "Yes, and my expectations for what they should be able to do were way beyond where they were at. But, yes, they did strive for student directed choice." Although Michael has shifted her mindset more towards choice-based learning for her students she admits, "I still feel

like that's (assessment) a part where I can't let control go completely, because I do grade them with a rubric. And I do grade their craftsmanship. And, and we talk a lot about something that is a WOW (wonderful, original work of art) should be at least a three-studio session. So just, I think because of the relationships I've built with the kids, you know, they know what I expected." She continued, "…where I used to, you know, try to get them to persevere. I still do sometimes, but it was kind of like, go go, go go. Whereas now it's more student centered and about the child and not so much about what I think it should look like."

When asked if this new approach had an impact on student experience and learning, she remarked, "Yeah, absolutely. I can't remember the last time a kiddo has gotten upset in art where it had been a weekly occurrence before. I've really gotten to know the kids developmentally at each grade level, kind of what I can expect in all the different ranges of differentiation. I think choice is just a wonderful, a wonderful thing. And I love to see the kids creating and happy and it's a much more positive experience for myself and for them."

Personal Artmaking

When asked if she created art on her own time, Michael responded,

I do create outside of school. I make paintings mostly for family, friends and my home. I sometimes start it at school…I don't really have time to work on it during school hours but once in a while I'll stay after school to work on something or use my whole lunch break and then eventually, I'll bring it home. I have an art studio shed as a creative space at home but with four kids it is hard to carve out time. I tend to have bursts of creative energy around the holidays. I also set up an art table for my kids in our family room where we draw, paint and collage. I do have a creative outlet with designing the set for the drama production, graphic designing roles for drama club and as an advisor for the yearbook. So, sometimes I am maxed out to create for myself.

Challenges

Michael described several challenges associated with being a singleton. She identified that frequent changes in administration, lack of understanding of art content, and general inattention all affect her experience as a singleton educator. She explained, "I feel like when being a singleton like, my administrators know nothing. Like if I ask them a question about the arts pathway, or the standards, they know absolutely nothing. And they'll say that, they'll lead with that. We used to have a curriculum director, but they (the district) reorganized to have the elementary principal and the high school principal take on that role. Our curriculum director, she was very knowledgeable. So, they're trying to kind of work that out right now."

Another challenge she identified was not having "anybody to bounce things off of." She explained,

Another thing I would add is sometimes I overthink things, like, am I doing (okay)? What am I supposed to be doing? Am I doing too much? Am I doing too

little? You know, like, I guess because I don't have anybody to bounce things off of. I don't have the resources to, to look at. I mean, my district did buy me the Art of Education, flex curriculum. This was my second year with that, which has been super helpful. Lots and lots and lots of curriculum material. So, it kind of supports what I was doing, okay, maybe, maybe this is rigorous.

She continued to describe that as a singleton she misses having a community of content knowledgeable colleagues to collaborate with and learn from. At Eagleton her art content colleague does not teach elementary art, so she does not have a colleague who shares this content focus. Additionally, her art colleague does not share her interest and focus on developing the district's art curriculum. She explained, "So then, like talking to my coworker who is, we have a fabulous relationship, and he's, he's great. And he always compliments you know, what we're doing and things like that, but it's so different, like, he couldn't talk on the standards, or, you know, the, the slideshow that I put up. He just doesn't do that kind of stuff. And so that's, that's probably one of my insecurities of being by myself is just the self-assurance and I'm doing a good job."

Another challenge is the daily demands of art teaching and the lack of understanding of "that world of creativity." Michael explained,

> Yeah, I guess, people don't realize like how much prep time it takes, like I spend, because I have a thirty minute prep in-between fifth grade and kindergarten, it takes me the whole thirty minutes to prep for this one kindergarten lesson and get all their centers ready and you know, prepare and have things even over prepared because it's kindergarten, and it could go west really quickly. So, I think they don't understand how much goes into our preparations and how long it takes to set up this display or set up the materials and that we don't just sit around, and you know, paint all day, like we've so much to do and they really don't have an understanding of what we do. You know, I still hear from time to time like, oh, it must be nice to you know, color with the kids all day. You know, even some TAs gasp at some of the (work). They make comments or they'll you know, correct a student for coloring with a different, you know color in the sky orange or something. And I have had to step in, and they they're just not, they're not used to. They're not used to that world of creativity, and they're just very subjective.

Michael described how being a singleton can be lonely. She explained,

> I guess it's kind of a lonely experience. Just not having that camaraderie. Even though the high school art teacher's upstairs, we never see each other. We don't have common time very often. It's very casual, like, friendly. But like I kind of talked about, we don't have a team. A strong sense of an arts team. Because we all have such different schedules. The music department is across the parking lot. So that makes it even more difficult to work with them. Yeah, so just say it's just a lot of (sighs) it just kind of solo a lot.

Michael described that although she appreciates the autonomy and trust the district provides her it can be challenging. She explained,

I get to school every day and you know, it's, it's really just up to me to, you know, no one checks in. No one, you know, I guess it's a pro and, and a con a little bit whereas, like, we do have, you know, the trust and the professionalism where they, you know, our programs are running like a well-oiled machine. But it's just, I don't see anybody in the morning. I go in my classroom and then my classes just start showing up. You know, if I have a behavioral problem, you know, it's, it's me follow up, you know, writing up the referral, following up, calling the parents, calling the office it's, it's a lot sometimes. To just do everything, everything solo, whereas like a TA, like sometimes don't really see the classroom teachers because their TAS literally do all the all the class drop offs and pickups. So, communicating with the classroom teachers is even an issue. I have to go seek them out. And a lot of times, they don't want to hear it, they don't have time to deal with our behavioral issues.

She described the challenge of curriculum and keeping up with standards work and advocating for changes, she stated, "It feels so overwhelming, sometimes with these initiatives that come from the state. It's like, I just feel like I'm already behind. And now this is brand new. And this is on my shoulders because I know that I'm gonna get pushback." She added, "And the administration has not said a peep about IAAP. So really, it needs to come from you all, if you want me to continue advocating for this and going to Arts Leadership and bringing it back to the district, then you need to be that piece with the high school teachers and the counselors. There's only so much I can do."

Skills for Success

Michael identified organization, self-efficacy, self-advocacy, self-reflection, research skills, life-long learner, adaptability, creativity, and a willingness to work with others as skills that have helped her navigate being a singleton art teacher. She described how she prepares for each new school year. She explained, "So, every year before school gets started, I always like, I always commit a data curriculum. So, I will go through my scope and sequence, my year at-a-glance, I will rework it. I'm constantly changing things, adding things, getting rid of things that aren't working. And I feel like reflecting on that, and just that being ongoing all the time, that's kind of helped me grow." She has learned to be organized and advocate for herself and for her students.

When asked for examples of skills she responded, "Organization yes! And putting in for those kinds of things, like, this is what I need for students to be successful. So, I feel like I've gotten better at setting boundaries and asking for help, and advocating and so, a lot to do. And I feel like communication is always something that needs to be worked on." Michael is an active part of the school community. In addition to her teaching assignments, she helps with the drama program working as a set designer and costume designer. She facilitates after-school and summer arts programming and works with the PTO (Parent Teacher Organization) and other community businesses and organizations to support student learning in the arts.

Advantages of Being a Singleton in a Small District

Michael expressed that she was drawn to the Eagleton community because of how welcome she felt when she first started teaching in the district as a .5 BOCES itinerant art teacher. She stated, "I felt like people cared. And when I would come in and have conversations, and people would stop out, they genuinely wanted to help. Eagleton is very much like; the school is the heart of the community. Everyone really rallied around the school, it's a big, like we all call it a family." Michael liked her position at Eagleton so much that she moved her family closer to the community so she could reduce her commute time and continue working there.

Michael described having freedom to develop her program as an advantage of working in a small district. She expressed that this freedom has both advantages and disadvantages in that there is a responsibility that comes with this autonomy.

Characteristics and Wants

When asked to describe characteristics of her singleton experience, Michael identified having to be a "one man show." She stated,

> What's unique to a singleton is that we're kind of like a one man show, we have to make decisions based on, you know, our own professional opinion, sometimes. Without feedback from others, we have to trust ourselves to kind of be the representative of our program. We don't have anything to compare to. Which is unique. And I love that piece, that like I have complete freedom to do my own curriculum and the art standards in New York State aren't saying, you know, you have to teach two-point perspective. So, that piece is unique. But also on the flip side, and it's like, sometimes I wish I did have somebody telling me, this is what you need to teach, because I guess, just that assurance that my program is strong and rigorous. And things like that.

Although Michael does have an art colleague in her building, they teach different grade levels and have very different approaches to professional development. She recalled, "The other art teacher and I have never attended anything together. Except for the initial New York State training for the New York State Arts Standards in like, 2017. Like, that's the only thing we've ever attended together the two art teachers in the district."

She continued to describe how demanding and lonely being a singleton can be. She stated, "Yeah, I think that's really the Achilles heel, is just taking all of it on by yourself and not being able to share that weight with anybody else. I've gotten better about asking for help and standing up for myself and having boundaries and, and even standing up to the to the high school art teacher about you know, like, this is not *want to* this is *a must do* kind of thing. But yeah, it's definitely lonely."

Michael described the advantages and disadvantages of being a singleton and having autonomy with curriculum decisions. She explained,

And it's like all of these districts have these teams of people. And you know, some of these teams, like some districts they have a curriculum person that writes out their curriculum, and they get handed these beautiful, like, lesson plans. And so, I guess, not that I want that by any means, but it is kind of a very, very stark difference in resources. So, I kind of flip flop on that a little bit like, oh, it's so nice to have this freedom to create this custom curriculum for my kids, but on the other hand, it's so much work and it's constantly consuming me and I'm constantly, you know, overthinking it sometimes. And I probably make way too much work for myself going back and forth. Whereas if I had someone to work with, we could kind of split that up a little bit.

She described as an art singleton; her professional development needs are not always considered when administrators are planning PD days. She stated, "Yeah on development days, sometimes we have to be like we're not on the schedule, and they'll be like, oh, right, just come to the wonders training." She described that as a singleton she is worried about "missing out on something major." She recalled when the district had a curriculum coordinator, she could rely upon to keep her "in the know." This void she identified as a characteristic of singleton-ness, she stated, "I think because I'm a singleton, I just don't have that community."

When asked to describe her wants as a singleton teacher, she stated "I wish that even though there's only two of us in such a small district…I wish there was almost given curriculum time like a teacher is given in their contract, the regular classroom teachers, and they're given three hours of curriculum a month, and that was never presented to, to us fine arts teachers." She also described wanting a network of local teachers with whom she could collaborate for support and professional development. She explained, "Yeah, I mean, in an ideal world, I would have, like, this network of art teachers that we constantly were in communication and, and had like, monthly, you know, meetings or, or even to go observe, like, a superstar teacher who, who works a lot with choice and how they organize their classroom and what their expectations and rubrics look like, and even teachers that have moved completely to TAB like, what does that look like?" Michael remarked, "Now, I guess, how cool would it be if we had an Eagleton, Hawktown, and Cowtown, you know, 20-mile radius little cohort, that would be awesome."

Michael worries about making sure the students at Eagleton have the same opportunities that art students at other districts have. She is aware of the IAAP initiative and wishes that her district would be more invested in making sure they have this graduation option for their art minded students. Advocacy is a characteristic of her singleton experience. She recalled how her previous superintendent who had an arts background and had been pursuing IAAP for the district and even increased her budget. She stated, "We had an arts minded superintendent come in and that's really the only reason why we (arts program) got kind of looked at. I got a kiln, that was my first kiln. I guess just, yeah, just being more of a part of the part of the big picture." The new administration has approached Michael regarding IAAP and she recalled her frustration, she explained,

I proposed that they get a team together, counselors, administration, the arts team, music and band. And I was like, this isn't a one man show. I couldn't do this on my own… these are decisions that I don't have the power to make. You know, I could recommend things, but I don't even have seventh through twelfth grade, I am Pre-K through six. So, they call, and they say, Well, what's this IAAP? And you know, how would that look for a district? And I can give them my recommendations, but I feel like just talking on deaf ears, like, there's nothing, there's no progress, there's no action. So that's frustrating.

Michael stated, "I want to have the best program I can provide for the kids, I guess, I always think every lesson should be an observable lesson. So, I always plan and over plan as if I was being observed every time. And maybe that's, maybe I need a break once in a while. Especially because no one really cares." Michael wants what is best for her students and explains how she has seen some changes in them and the culture of their classrooms since COVID. She described,

And my coworkers (other special area teachers) and I talk about this quite a bit too. The kids come to us, and they've been sitting all day. They don't get to be themselves. They don't get to talk in most situations. Not a lot of collaboration. It's hard. I don't know if it's happening at your district, but it is happening in Eagleton, they haven't quite got back to like pre COVID play based learning. So, when they come to us, I feel like it's this huge relief for them. Where they can really be themselves and they're trying to express themselves. Yeah, that's very different.

Michael described wanting her colleagues and parents to understating the nature of arts learning. She stated, "I feel like, when parents want, they still want those cute little silhouettes, and especially for the littles, you know, they, they want those teacher-created pieces of art, and they, you know, they don't understand." She noted that parents are supportive of the arts program, but she does "…feel like I have to explain my philosophy a lot more now that I'm very much choice based. Not only to parents, but co-workers too." She continued,

Yeah, so I've definitely made a connection, like, when something is more technique based or skill based. I get a lot more compliments, people will come out of their way to the staff room and be like, oh, my goodness, those self-portraits look amazing. Oh, they're so cute, you see their little personality, and each of them. Then when I throw up an art is painting, and it's just paintings, you know, K through five. And, you know, there's so much range and ability and creative risk taking and everything… So, I definitely have made a connection. Where, and that goes back to where, you know, the expectation is, I still feel pressured to do more skill-based projects and things because that's really where the reception is from my coworkers, and principal. And I guess that's just what they're used to. So, kind of just slowly, kind of trying to change their view. And I've explained it to my principal how I've been slowly moving to choice and, and why. She's very supportive. And then you got the parents that are totally on board, you know, with creative choice. So, there's just a vast range of comments I guess, feedback. And what art should look like.

Summary

Michael's eleven years at Eagleton Central School has been full of changes. Changes in room assignments. Changes in scheduling and curricular demands. Changes in administration and support for arts learning and her role as a singleton art teacher. Despite these changes, Michael described her dedication to reflecting upon and improving her teaching and students' art learning experiences. Michael's philosophy of art education supports choice-based learning in her classroom. Although she admits it has been challenging in a small community environment to move her curriculum towards choice learning, she continues to advocate for what she believes is best for her students. She identified that not everyone "understands" what happens in an art classroom or what creativity looks like.

Michael has a master's degree in curriculum and is very conscientious when it comes to aligning her program to the *new* New York State Visual Arts Standards and advocating for the district to participate in the Individual Art Assessment Pathway (IAAP). When she began at Eagleton, the district did not have any elementary art resources to support her lesson development and teaching. Through her own research and advocacy, she gathered resources and attended professional development training to help develop a viable elementary art curriculum. Michael's story included moments of frustration when she did not feel supported or valued by her colleagues and administration. It also included examples of how she and her singleton colleagues support one another as best they can with their busy work schedules.

Michael identified several characteristics as part of her singleton experience. She described instances of feeling like a "one-man-show" and not having anyone to "bounce ideas off from." She explained that being a singleton means that she has had to advocate for herself and her students for materials, space, resources, curriculum, professional development, and time. She identified that not all her colleagues and administrators have had a good working understanding of the art curriculum and that at times she has had to defend her professional choices for her students' learning. Michael feels the pressure of keeping her knowledge and her program up to date with the initiatives for the arts put forth by the state. She would like to move the district arts program towards providing students the opportunity to participate in IAAP, but her veteran arts colleagues do not share her enthusiasm and progress with her new administration is slow.

Michael has found support in BOCES arts professional development offerings, but it is difficult to take time away from her classroom because of a sub shortage and the instruction and work time her students lose when she is away. Michael loves the "freedom" of creating "custom curriculum" for her students but identified that this is a plus and a minus. Creating your own curriculum and having no one to "bounce ideas off of" leaves Michael, at times, worried about if she is "overthinking it" and making more work for herself.

When asked what she would ask for as a singleton educator she stated she would like access to a network of teachers, more local, who could support one another as arts educators. She

has attended such a community as part of MOBOCES, but she noted that it is too far away, and she is not able to attend many of the PD offerings. She would like common planning time for her and her art(s) colleagues so they could create a more cohesive support structure in her district. She would also like her colleagues and administration to have a better understanding of arts learning.

Michael described how much she loves her small school district and this tight knit community. She participates in many extra-curricular activities such as being the set and costume designer for their drama department and teaching afterschool and summers art programs. She is actively invested in growing and improving her art program and has demonstrated this in the efforts she has made on behalf of the district to learn about the new arts standards and IAAP initiative.

Mrs. Art's Story ~ Appleton High School

Teacher Background Demographics

Mrs. Art (pseudonym) served as an art teacher in public school for thirty-five years. She retired from Appleton Central School District (pseudonym) in upstate New York in 2022 after teaching visual arts there for twenty-eight years. For most of her career, Mrs. Art taught grades nine through twelve high school art levels one through five as a singleton teacher in her district. Appleton Jr/Sr High School serves 341 students across grades seven through twelve (data.nysed.gov). A second visual arts teacher who primarily teaches middle school seventh and eighth grade visual arts is also assigned to this school building.

Before teaching at Appleton High School, Mrs. Art taught for five years in another comparably sized school district, also in New York. After five years, that position was eliminated, and Mrs. Art applied for and received a teaching position at Appleton Central School District where she remained for the rest of her career. Mrs. Art noted that her path to Appleton was ironic since she had previously interviewed for a position there right out of college but did not get it due to her, then, lack of experience. When the position became available again after five years, and at the time she was job searching again and she was happy to have another opportunity to work at Appleton.

When asked about growing up and her experiences with art and teaching, Mrs. Art described her hometown as being like the Appleton community. Mrs. Art grew up in a rural community east of Albany and across the Hudson. She recalled, "It was a very, it was rural, very rural…and (the district) it encompassed quite a large amount of it took up a lot of mileage. So, for example, my bus ride was fifty minutes." Like Appleton, Mrs. Art's community was a short driving distance from an urban center, "A mere 15-20 minutes from downtown Albany." She explained, "There was a mix of, you know, say, like, farms and families, and, you know, and then suburban kind of community… As far as, you know, we had one grocery store, we had one gas station, we had, you know … the town was like, you blink, and you're, you know, it was just a four-corner kind of thing. Very similar to where I ended up teaching. In both cases actually, my first job and the one I had for a very long time."

Mrs. Art described her upbringing in a "very rural area." She explained that she "had very few children close by or even my own age for playmates." Her mom would set her up at a table with art materials to occupy her time. She remarked that both of her parents "played a big role in my interest in art and teaching." She credits her mother's side of the family for her "teaching gene." Her maternal grandmother taught kindergarten and her great uncle taught art education at the college level. She recalled, "Even before kindergarten, I played school."

Mrs. Art's father worked as an electrician and she recalled, "Using your brain and being creative with your hands and making things and figuring out how things worked. And fixing things was right up his alley." Her father had a workshop in his garage where she "worked alongside him when I was young." She explained, "He taught me how to hammer a nail, drill a

hole, saw a straight cut, and measure accurately. I was the only girl in my middle-school wood and metal shop classes." She remarked, "Little did my dad know how greatly his simple acts of instruction would benefit me when I majored in painting as an undergraduate in college and stepped foot into a large workroom filled with power tools and other toys."

Mrs. Art's described her mother,

> My mom earned her music teaching degree from Ithaca College of Music. She played instruments all her life. She did do some art, but it wasn't something that she spent a lot of time doing. She was more of a homemaker. She stayed at home with us kids. And she worked giving piano lessons out of the house and so forth. She used her creativity in sewing.

Mrs. Art recalled, "When I was in middle school, I was extremely fortunate to have two very exceptional art teachers, who were very forward thinking, in my opinion. They had an after-school art club, and I was very shy, very quiet, I would sit and do my artwork. And I was always very invested in what we were doing, I fully enjoyed it." She recalled a moment when her art teacher pointed out her natural ability. She explained,

> And one of the things that really stuck with me was the time that one of the art teachers came over to me. And I was in the process of doing this oil pastel artwork… And she just said to me, she goes, 'you are really good.' And that really stuck with me. It made me feel so good. I'm like, holy cow. Okay. Is it good? I guess it is. If she said so. Because I had so much respect for her.

Mrs. Art described another time an art teacher influenced her drive towards pursuing art education. She had a teacher who was a practicing artist and would bring in his works and show the students what he was working on. She explained,

> It was the first time that I actually saw an art teacher who was a practicing artist, as well. And I was like, this is really neat. I like this. I was so enamored with that. He would every once in a while, he would show the students what he would be doing…In the summer, the Saratoga Performing Arts Center was probably thirty-five minutes away. He would go up when the New York City Ballet was in town. He would go backstage, he had a special pass, he would go sit backstage and draw the performers of the ballet. Ballerinas, this is like Edgar Degas. Like, this is so cool. And it would just, it really cemented the idea of I need to be an art teacher. This is really something I can see myself being, an art teacher. From tenth grade on, it just kind of cemented my thoughts that I was driven towards that goal.

Mrs. Art's recalls her high school graduating between 100-120 students per year. She described her school as being diverse in that the community included families from many different nationalities due to the proximity to the state capital. She also described her school district as being progressive in that "there was a lot of instruction that was considered more modern, in its scope." She did comment that her home community was not as "cohesive" as Appleton where the community comes together certain times of the year and has "large celebrations based upon some of the local things that make that place very special." She noted, "I

think the cohesion that I experienced was more involved in my church or something along those lines." She also commented that "It is really interesting how, you know, the rolling hills and stuff echo where I grew up. And so, it felt like home."

After graduation from high school, Mrs. Art entered a two-year liberal arts college to study art then transferred to Syracuse University as an undergraduate painting major and continued on to complete her master's degree in art education. She recalled, "My mom was super supportive. My dad was worried, a little bit, because what I wanted to do was go to school for art, and then add on the art education degree. He was a little bit worried. But he came on, he supported me, he did not tell me I shouldn't." She added, "My parents, especially my mom was of the mindset that get your degree, no one can take that away from you." She recalled, "I think the mindset of certain individuals, that even still stands today, that, oh, you'll be a starving artist. You won't be able to support yourself." She admitted, that because of her passion for art, "I don't think I could have done anything else."

Mrs. Art's two younger siblings both chose art-related careers. She explained, "My sister, became an artist…she got a degree in illustration, and is currently a practicing artist…She's involved in gallery work, and she paints. She also does 2D and 3D. I think we're the painter, sculptor sisters. My brother went the engineering route."

Mrs. Art's preservice teacher training did not include rural learner or small community focused instruction or experiences. She stated, "There was no differentiation between small, urban, whatever, it was definitely, the focus was predominantly on art-based education and designing lesson plans based on an art object or an art period or an artist or group of artists." Mrs. Art's student teaching placements were both in larger suburban/urban districts teaching first at the middle school level and then at the high school level.

Teaching Environment

According to census data, the community of Appleton is identified as Rural (41) Fringe and Rural (42) Distant (Census.gov). The district is located ten miles from an urban center with a population of approximately 150,000 people (Census.gov). Appleton has a population of 4,842 +/- 353 residents (Census.gov.). The Appleton Central School District is comprised of a Pre-K through sixth grade elementary school, a middle/junior/senior high school, and a secondary (alternative) high school. The district geographically also includes an American Indian Nation Community which has its own Pre-K through eighth grade school. The district total enrollment is 739 students, Pre-K through twelfth grade (data.nysed.gov).

The district community supports several small businesses such as a dollar store, diner, McDonalds, bank, and two gas stations. There is a post office, library, medical offices, and community churches in the immediate town area. The main town intersection is directly off a major highway allowing residents easy access to neighboring towns and the nearby urban center. The outskirts of the small village consist of the rolling hills of this rural farmland community.

Appleton is known for its apple orchards and the culture of the American Indian Nation Community within this district. Mrs. Art does not live in the Appleton school district and commutes twenty minutes each way to work.

Mrs. Art described her classroom.

> Well, the classroom is located just off of the main hallway, just a few doors down from the main office and the guidance office. There's one entry door. Students will enter in, and the room opens up, it's just a large open room. One wall, the west wall has all storage cabinets, up top and on the bottom. That is where the three sinks are located. I was very lucky to have three sinks. What a luxury that is. One of the sinks is wheelchair designed. The south wall had the large Promethean board mounted to the wall. I also had an old whiteboard there and tack board that I could display information that I needed to have out on a regular basis. My desk was up close to that west facing wall so that my computer could be close to the Promethean board. On the east facing wall, it's all windows, huge windows. Underneath the windows, was all bookshelves, where things could be stored. It was broken up by the heating unit on that one side. In the north-east corner of the room, I had a kiln with ventilation and a little bit of storage in that area. I used that northeast corner for the clay area. I had a couple of kick wheels and my kiln. My clay storage was over there and a wedging table. The back of the room, I had more storage, portfolio storage. A lot of 2D storage was back in there and shelving, never enough shelving, but you know, and then the center of the room had all the tables and chairs in it. In that part of the room, I was able to do a variety of different media.

Mrs. Art described the art forms she had taught over the years. "I did clay and sculpture. I had units of drawing, mixed media, different styles of painting, acrylic and watercolor and gouache." She also taught fibers, felting, and printmaking. She once had a darkroom but that was "eliminated" when her room was renovated. The classroom does not have computers anymore since students now have their own Chromebooks.

Mrs. Art described rearranging her art room over the years to accommodate different art forms and workspaces for her students. She was always thinking about "The best way I wanted to disseminate the information, what would work best." Because of the constant changing of materials for students from class to class throughout the days she devised a system to "hide" materials until she needed them for lessons. She explained,

> Organizing materials was always a challenge and to make it look good to an observer was also my goal, you know, and I didn't want mess out and you don't want other things out that perhaps could be utilized by mistake…So no, 'No, no, no, that's acrylic paint, not printmaking ink!' So, you want to be careful. I was always mindful of, you know, what do I have to have out. So, I rigged up this… I bought fabric and basically sewed skirts for the materials tables, and they were metal, so I could attach everything with magnets. So, I had this lovely skirt, and underneath, it would hide all my trays with all my materials. So, like Vanna

White pulling out, 'oh, and here's table number two.' You know, and you quickly switch out and move the other materials back under. It was a juggle, but if you were prepared it was very easy.

Scheduling

Mrs. Art's schedule and teaching assignments changed over the years depending upon the district's initiatives. At one time the district was following a block schedule. She explained,

The district tried a variety of different scenarios. We had block scheduling for ten years. And the middle school, that scheduled varied. Sometimes it was, you would see the classes for twenty weeks. Sometimes you'd only see them for ten weeks. And that varied year after year…I found it very difficult. I could do it, but it was very difficult for the students. Especially if you had a middle school group, which only met once every four days. Sometimes, during the winter times if you had a snow day it would be a much more prolonged time between classes. And it was difficult to get the content of your curriculum in that block.

The district moved away from block scheduling and Mrs. Art's classes met for forty-three minutes daily at the time she retired. The district implemented a Professional Learning Community (PLC) model a few years before her retirement and Mondays had an abbreviated schedule to allow PLC teams to meet weekly on district initiatives. She recalled, "I believe we had been following an amended schedule on Mondays for probably three years, maybe four. Every Monday, we would dismiss at two o'clock. So, class periods would be shortened on every Monday, and the timeframe from 2pm to the end of the school day, the end of the contractual time would be spent with PLCs."

Mrs. Art described her typical schedule,

Yeah, I started the day, like my typical day, for example. The class schedule could be like Studio in Art I. And then I'd have a plan period. And then I had Studio in Art III and IV combined. Then I had a combined class of Ceramics and Fibers and Art III and V. Back to an Art I class, a lunch, a plan, another Art I. And then Studio and Art III and IV together. So, I had 1, 2, 3, 4, 5… I taught six classes usually every day, that was extremely common in most school years.

When asked about the content of her Studio in Art classes, Mrs. Art responded, "I do teach it (Studio in Art) as a combination of 2D and 3D. So, for example, you would have a painting experience, drawing experiences, printmaking, a clay experience, another type of 3D experience." When asked about class sizes she responded,

It was all based on when they could be scheduled in the master scheduled during the school year. So, for Art III and IV. The higher up, the higher the level, the smaller the class size became. So, in Studio in Art, you'd have a class of eighteen. Studio in Art II would shrink down to you, you'd lose a portion of those kids. So, you'd go from maybe a class size of eighteen, you'd drop down to twelve. If you were lucky. And then it would get smaller and smaller and smaller. So sometimes

in level IV, you'd have maybe four kids, maybe five… Yep, and this is why I threw kids together. Because the more options you have to take, maybe that person couldn't take (art) during period three, but my period eight was open. And so, they could scoot in.

Mrs. Art shared the challenges of scheduling in a small district with only one advanced art teacher. When asked about having multiple levels of students in one class period she stated her goal was to "…keep the kids in the program as much as possible. Especially the ones who really want it or who, by a wonderful happenstance, wanted to major in art. So that was, those were the big priorities." When asked how she managed different levels of students Mrs. Art explained,

So, when I was tasked with teaching levels, three, four, and five. And sometimes there was a sixth level, depending on that person who doubled up all the time. So, what I would do is I would design a curriculum that was different every year, with projects that were different every year. And I had three binders: art three, art four, art five. And I would, I would rotate them. So that if a student was in art three with me, they would probably be a in art four the next year, but they'd be in the same class. So, I had lessons that would rotate. So, one year, you'd have printmaking, but you do portraits, and the next year, you do printmaking, but you do it with landscapes. And the following year, you do it and then once those students graduated, you could rotate your curriculum right back around to square one again. So, I made it, so I would not be tearing my hair out teaching. I could devote equal time to everybody. Nobody would be confused. It would just be just more fluid and organized. So that's how I did that.

Budget

When asked to describe the budget for her program over the years, Mrs. Art stated, "…at first, when I first got there, the budget was extremely large, very, very, very generous, extremely generous. And because of financial concerns, rightfully so, they had to cut back, they couldn't continue on that path. So, yeah, you really have to understand. I never felt like… I could always use a little bit more, but certainly, they gave me enough to do what I needed to do. What I felt was quality curriculum and covered many different things. It's gonna give them a well-rounded experience." Over the years, Mrs. Art was responsible for budgeting, selecting, and ordering the materials for her courses.

Curriculum

Mrs. Art was part of the group who structured the initial written art curriculum. She noted, "It has been rewritten three times in the duration of my employment." Here, Mrs. Art explained how she gathered information and resources for her art lessons,

I really gleaned a lot of inspiration and ideas from a variety of sources. From printed material, like books, magazines, periodicals, as well as online articles, and websites. And from other teachers and college professors during lectures or classes or discussions, museums and galleries, art shows, art competitions,

displays, and also BOCES classes and workshops. And additionally, like, NYSATA, and the NEA workshops and letters and other printed material like that. I would get ideas from just about anywhere. It could be a piece of jewelry I would see, or a photograph in a magazine with ceramic pieces on a table or reading a book in the summer about a specific artist and becoming inspired to do a lesson around either the time period or the artist or their media.

She described this work as "part of the joy and also part of the hard work of being a singleton art teacher." She researched information for content, technique, and pedagogy looking to other educators and organizations for examples and "knowledge". She explained.

It wasn't always in the forefront of my mind to, oh, I'm gonna act like that. That wasn't my goal. It was more on the line of taking some ideas from how they structured their class, or how they delivered the material (Pause) or how they organized and how they spoke, what words they use to disseminate the information. I had access through online, you can research a lot of different online information for that, specifically for art teachers, or you can watch videos, there's tons of stuff out there. But the individuals that I was most interested in were those who I felt were delivering a very quality, quality information in a very factual based way. And I could tell that their knowledge was true and of quality.

Appleton district hired a curriculum coordinator. Mrs. Art described this experience stating,

Well, the district has a written kindergarten through twelve curriculums, which the instructors have played a key role in developing, and it follows the new New York State Standards for the Arts. We originally, at the high school level, saw that the New York State Arts Standards were being rewritten. And in doing research, we discovered that at the national level, they had rewritten the standards well before New York State. We adapted and adopted the National Standards before the new N. Y. S. Arts Standards were in place. So, we felt very prepared when we had to tackle and add in the new N. Y. S. Arts Standards and adapt and adopt those.

Mrs. Art indicated that the school "provided most of the time and guidance for that". She explained, "We had a curriculum coordinator who worked with us to guide us through that process. It was placed online, so it was an online resource that everyone could work on independently if need be. There were assigned curriculum tasks and deadlines for developing up and completing portions of the curriculum. And so, we would, indeed have to also work on our own time to make sure that those deadlines were met." She stated that the art instructors from Pre-K through twelve, from each building, "would come together, either in person or online, and rewrite the curriculum, update it to reflect the standards and so forth." She explained,

The units were specified within the curriculum. So, the district would have a specified set of units in which we were expected to complete. From that, we really had lot of freedom to develop projects that would fit into those larger unit topics. So, for example, a unit would have been painting. And within that unit, you could

do multiple lessons. It could be based on materials such as watercolor, or acrylic painting, or gouache. You could also bring in other specific types of techniques. For example, in my Studio II course, I did a painting unit, specifically on Impressionist paintings, and painters.

She continued, "It was left to the teachers to develop their own personal interpretation of that curriculum. There were no set required lessons that were dictated to be delivered." When asked if the curriculum coordinator had an arts specific background she responded,

I believe she was a generalized curriculum coordinator. However, she did an exceptionally good job at guiding us with how to structure everything. And from her structure, it made it so easy to do everything else. Everything aligned. You could do your rubric by looking at the objectives that you had. And you had all the wording that you chose to deliver to the students, all your learning targets, all your essential vocabulary, all the New York State Standards. It was simple to pull from each part and coordinate it. It made it so simple. It made it very easy.

Access

In addition to working with her colleagues on curriculum through the school sponsored weekly PLC meetings, Mrs. Art described having monthly department meetings. "We had an art and music committee that met. And so that was also a community that was a good resource. And it was there and provided if you actually needed (to clarify) additional questions or had concerns." When asked, did you find that a place where you could have someone that you could talk and interact with during those times? Mrs. Art responded, "The time was more spent on curriculum. The times where I got to interact with another art teacher would have been during the day when I had either lunch, depending on the schedule, lunch or after school." When asked how frequently she met with colleagues she stated, "I can say that that was pretty frequently over the last ten years." She continued, "And so every once in a while, we would have that opportunity to have sit down and have that camaraderie and have interchange of ideas." When asked about common planning time or lunchtime, she responded, "That varied, so your schedule changed from year to year."

When asked about access to outside of school in personal professional development with other art teachers she responded, "Rarely did I have time or knowledge of the actual event happening. Like, oh, dear, if I knew that was happening, I'd gone to that, yeah, that sounded, you know, blah, blah, blah. Or the offerings in general, there were very few things available that were offered during the time I could go to able to participate in in-person things."

School and Community Support

When asked how she would describe the school's support for her teaching and art programing, Mrs. Art responded,

Words that would come to mind are supportive and encouraging. Our district provided art classes for all grade levels seven through twelve. Our administration

supported and encouraged new course development in response to student need or interest. And that's how the ceramics and fibers course came along. The administration supported our teachers' endeavors such as after school art, the Scholastic Arts Competition, art shows and exhibit opportunities. The administration was always recognizing and honoring the art students' accomplishments at board meetings, and in their newsletters. And the district art rooms were included in renovation projects. So, they really did support the art in the district. They also provided areas for student display of artwork throughout the building. And the teachers in our building also supported ideas that we started, such as a growth mindset poster, the students designed posters within the art class digitally. Instructors got to select from the posters the ones that were custom designed for their subject matter. And they were able to display them outside their classroom doors. So, I feel that it was very supportive and enriching.

Mrs. Art also expressed feeling supported by the community. She stated, "Again, I think the community did support that, because we were able to offer art from seventh grade through twelfth grade in the building where I taught. Parents attended open houses, they attended board meetings to support their children, when they were being recognized. And also, the town library was very open to displaying student artwork on a regular basis, we had a rotating display. And we're very involved with the library."

Student Art Opportunities Outside of School

When asked if there were art related opportunities for students outside of school Mrs. Art responded, "Not that I am aware of. And that's not to say there weren't, because I know there were artists in the community. And I know some students took advantage of the art programs that were offered at art stores and museums (in the neighboring city)."

Personal Artmaking

When asked about her personal artmaking Mrs. Art responded, I was a painting major as an undergrad. And so, I continue to paint in a variety of mediums. I draw. I do jewelry and some sewing, and a lot of mixed media things. I work in clay I have a kick wheel in my basement. Last year, I challenged myself to do watercolor portraits. So, I did fifteen watercolor portraits just to challenge myself. So, things like that, I vary. When asked if she created her own art while she was teacher she responded, "Not as much as I would have liked. But yes."

Teaching Philosophy

Mrs. Art described her teaching philosophy as being centered around encouraging the student "to thinking like an artist... because you can apply those, that thought structure, to anything that you do." She expressed how in the last ten years of her teaching career she "focused on providing students with ways to do things that weren't expensive" and "providing them with art related skills." Her hope was "to make art accessible to everyone." She joked about being teased about Bob Ross. She laughingly remarked, "Oh if that brings people joy,

that's okay. I mean, especially with the social-emotional learning and the kids with you know, a lot of stuff going on in our lives if it brings you joy and that's a great thing." She recalled after COVID the "flood gates opening up" after being confined to 2D projects and distance learning and her excitement to be able to do printmaking and clay and … with her students.

She described "diving into conceptual art" with her students. She recalled, "And I saw a lot of amazing artworks come out of that conceptual pathway, because they could, (pause) and I encouraged them to bring in ideas that they had been exposed to. And I learned so much from them, oh, my sister was there, or my aunt was there, and this happened and that happened." She remembered, one of my principals was all about, it was worded voice and choice. And that kind of, those little key words, resounded with my kind of theory of it, it fit nicely."

She continued by describing her desire to provide her students with a view of art and an experience of "oh, hey, have you ever seen this?" She expressed she wanted to share the "discovery" of art and recalled, "When I was a kid, I never had somebody do that for me. And I didn't go to a teeny tiny school. I know my grandmother did that for her students. And maybe that's that little kernel of her growing bamboo by her mailbox, so that she could bring it into her kindergarten class and show her kids what pandas ate. Because pandas were gifted to the Washington Zoo during her time that she had that group of kids." She continued, "So I don't know. That's just part of me. And something I enjoyed giving to students, providing them with, the sharing the joy of hey, look at this. This is really nice."

Challenges

Mrs. Art identified several challenges associated with being a singleton art teacher such as time, being responsible for materials, grading, technology, promoting your program, advocacy, lesson preparation and curriculum planning, research, access to professional development outside of school, and misconceptions about what an art teacher does. She explained,

> To get down to details that would be really finding the time to do everything that material prep. And speaking of materials, just what materials to order, what quality materials are there out there. That can be somewhat of a guessing game when you're all by yourself, and you don't have anybody to say, oh, by those brushes, they're amazing. Grading is also sometimes a challenge, because there is no one else to specify, you know, the grading. But I must say that going back to what we talked about earlier, with a curriculum coordinator, that became very easy, but you've got to have a good foundation in creating rubrics and what to put in each level and how to break down the numbers to be, and you're talking about specifics, so whereas in a younger grade, I've seen grading on, you know, satisfactory, and so forth, at the high school level, you need to put down a number, and you need to really have solid, factual evidence to back up that number. So that was a at first hard work, and then it became easier. Another challenge is technology, Google Classroom, if you're the first to do it, it is a little

bit of the learning curve. Promoting courses, so if you want to develop a new course, you have to know how do I get the word out to students that this is going to be happening and to get them excited and interested to sign up for the class. And so, you had to be your own advocate that way, make your poster asked to go into a meeting of you know, the ninth grade is having a meeting on Thursday. Asked if you can have a few minutes to talk, things like that. So, you have to really kind of hustle in some ways. All the different parts of your lessons. So, the technology, I found when I went from paper handouts to Google slide presentations. So, to transition everything over to a product that could be viewed on a Chromebook was a lot of work, but really a wonderful benefit. Especially when doing distance learning, especially if you have a sub.

Mrs. Art described a time when she had to advocate for value for her role as art teacher and art content learning. She explained, "There was a point in which, earlier on in my career, where it(art) was seen as a form of enhancement of somebody else's units or projects, as well as, you know, let's ask the art teacher to do this. I was shocked when the popsicle sticks and pom poms and glitter came out. And that's what I was supposed to be using. Rather, I don't know, shall we say insulting." She continued, "What one of the negative things I have had, that I perceived as negative was when I was expected to be the craft kind of person to provide very rudimentary little projects for, that we're not a reflection of my curriculum or what I would be doing in the art room. So, I think it's important to understand that an art teacher, for the most part, at least in New York State has art as part of their background in some form or another. And so, the degree of professionalism on that end is very high. And the amount of time and effort and things that go into studying that subject matter is just as much, if not more so in many instances, then, perhaps another discipline."

Mrs. Art described instances when she felt disrespected by her colleagues. She explained, "There were only a handful or so of times when I was totally taken aback by someone who would interrupt a lecture or a large group instruction that was going on. Yeah, it's, it's a little bit concerning. Because I wouldn't have ever done that to someone else. Because I, I respect their time with their students and so forth and so on."

Mrs. Art also described the challenges of attending professional development outside of school. She indicated a concern for the time she was away from her classroom. She noted she "wasn't willing to give up a ton of time…Because your curriculum suffers, and your students suffer. And you know, they need you there. And so, it's a double-edged sword, it really is." She commented about the availability of subs and how this impacted her mindset for taking time away from her classroom. She stated, "Yeah, availability, frequency of absence, you know, we didn't want to be away. Things were very tight. And it was also difficult to ah, I think the subs are the biggest block to going places and doing things." She recommended,

It's a very good thing for young a younger person who's coming into teaching should know to be thorough. Be over prepared. Really, maybe rewrite your lesson

plans for that day that you're going to be out, plan something else. Because if you don't want everyone to, you know, have X or Y or carving knives or whatever out and you are not there. Yeah, you want to… there were a few times where I did go ahead and okay, they're just doing what they're doing. And this is what they have. So, I would pre-plan. I would give this person, these are your three items, you keep these with you and your portfolio. And then I would leave a note with a sub. Sam has three blah, blah, blah, you know, so I would go down through every single child, this person is doing this, these three children are doing that. So, I gave very individualized instructions. It is a concern. You will have a different quality of individuals subbing for you. To be blatantly honest, some people don't read sub plans, they will sit and what happens during those forty-two minutes. Yeah, that's reality…. Very rarely, I think we had maybe only three years when we had a person who had a degree in art or had a combination of art ed. and/or art background. Very rare.

In addition to the sub situation being a barrier to professional development, Mrs. Art identified that some of the PD offerings that were geared towards art processes and techniques were not practical for implementing in her classroom. She explained,

But another thing that I found about professional development, we're talking primarily like media and techniques and things like that, some of the things were extremely expensive, and extremely difficult to do in a classroom setting. I found it was fun for me to do personally. But to take that and multiply it eighteen times and to get eighteen of those items, or eighteen of that, enough for a class set was way out of our price range it would have in order to interject that you'd have to go out and write a grant to have that in your classroom. And then it would be perhaps only a one-time situation. I never got super excited about those options. So, I didn't really pursue very many of those.

Mrs. Art identified that it is not only colleagues but administrators who may or may not understand what learning is happening in an art classroom. She recalled times when she wished she had had more constructive feedback during evaluations and appreciated when her administrators did have some knowledge or appreciation of the "time and effort that went into art." She explained,

I think one of the nice things that I've encountered in my experiences is when an administrator is open to corrections, many times what is perceived is not a clear representation of what you are doing or using, and that is certainly not their fault, because they don't have that background in materials and techniques. So, I've happily been able to help out people in making changes within the observation paperwork to accommodate, you know, a misconception or misuse of vocabulary or what have you. I think it does really help if you have an administrator who has some background in art. Especially for example, I had an administrator who had a nephew, a family member who was a sculptor, they could appreciate the time and effort that went into creating artwork.

Skills for Success

Mrs. Art responded that "You have to be self-motivated, you have to be a problem solver. You really have to be self-sufficient. You have to be very organized. And you have to be inventive and creative," when asked to describe skills for her success as a singleton art educator in a small rural district. She continued, "You need to complete all the work on your own curriculum development, art displays, no one else is going to do that you're the one and you need to be the advocate for your students in your program."

She described instances of self-advocacy and having to promote her program by example. She explained how perception of the art program changed over time, "I think, in part, it was due to administrative changes. I think it was in part due to the familiarity with me and the quality of work and standards that I was requiring and showing proof visually, that students were performing at a visible level."

Mrs. Art also identified dedication as an attribute necessary for success. She shared, "I have a workspace at home. I could not always stay at school after hours because of family. So having a space dedicated, you know, whether that was a spot on the dining room table, or what have you, but having a space so that you can extend your work time was essential for me to feel prepared." Other skills that emerged in Mrs. Art's description of her experiences were an ability to research and be self-taught, curiosity and enthusiasm for art content, compassion for her students, willingness to work with colleagues towards common goals, humility, and resourcefulness.

Advantages of a Small District

Mrs. Art identified autonomy and lack of competition as advantages to being a singleton art educator. She explained,

> Well, I felt like I had a lot of independence. I felt like I had to be very self-sufficient and motivated, and a problem solver. There wasn't, my being a single person, there's no other competition, which can be a very positive freeing experience. So that you have free rein, it comes to my mind. Oh, gosh, the main thing is that creative freedom. To have no one there to tell you no. Not that I was a risk taker. But when you get this idea that you're going to do totems, and we're going to do them out of clay, and we're going to have teams and you just kind of run with these ideas. So that creative freedom was just really wonderful, for me. I did not find a really negative about being having to work and not answer to anyone.

Mrs. Art identified both positives and negatives regarding having small class sizes. She explained,
> The challenge about having a super small class is that I had to learn, not to hover, to give the students space, to do their artwork, and to find a constructive way to

utilize myself in the room, that would be an educational experience for the students if necessary. So, for example, if you have a very large, older group of students in an upper-level art class, you could do the project alongside of them. So, I could set up an easel, or a workspace and be creating my own version of the assignment with them. Also, small classes allow you to really help people, I found it really beneficial to be able to circulate around the room and address student problems or concerns or struggles much more easily than I would if I had a very large number of students in the room. It gives you the ability to address multiple concerns. It also allows you more room in the class to have students spread out and have so much space to do other things. So that's a nice plus. You can do a little bit larger items with the upper-level groups and not have to worry about running out of materials so much. You get to know your students a little bit better. And they may or may not feel more welcome in your classroom because of that personal connection and your ability to spend time with them. Sitting in the chair next to them or wherever and giving them their own personal, you know, coach.

She also described the advantages of the social environment of a small school and being able to interact and get to know the students, over the years. She explained,

And that was sometimes an amazing thing to watch. Some students are extremely quiet. For example, I had a student who rarely spoke at all, in ninth grade. And by the time that person got to twelfth grade, because they took art every year, what a change, more self-confident, more able to express verbally their needs, (they) weren't tearing up their artwork every time they did something, (they accepted) their ideas were okay. And it's just nice to see them grow up sometimes. That's the nice thing about a small school where you can know everyone and see and have those people year after year.

Mrs. Art also identified how knowing all the students and being housed in the same building and following the same structure created a common bond between the teachers and administrators. She explained,

I feel like the students are always that perk, that element of similarity. And so, when you would go into the teacher's room, or you went to the guidance office, or you spoke to your administrator about a student or a group of students, everyone could input, and you would come out with some constructive feedback or information to pursue. So really, the students are similar, your building structure is going to be very similar. So, you all have the same things, hopefully, to share, like libraries and let's go to watch something in the auditorium, we're going to go do something on the stage. And so, you will have that to work with. And all sorts of other similarities that you encounter.

Characteristics

When asked to describe characteristics of her singleton experience Mrs. Art responded,

Well, the singleton experiences is definitely unique, you alone are responsible for creating, for implementing, critiquing, and reflecting on your own content, as well as the success of the lessons. There's really… I did not have a lot of feedback that I felt was really critical and constructive, that truly identified good or bad features of the lesson, and its implementation. Administratively, when I was observed. I never had another teacher come in my room and assess. I have had multiple people come in and observe me teaching. And collaborative opportunities were very limited for me. We did, the other art teacher and I did collaborate on an end of the year, mini unit. On multiple years, we'd all do a chalk drawing competition kind of thing. And then the whole school would get to vote on who was best this or most colorful or what have you. But those opportunities are super limited simply because you're the only teacher doing this, and that person is the only teacher doing that. I have experienced an average of five preps per year, that's an average. Not every instructor has that many preps. So that could be seen as a very negative thing. I saw it as a positive, in that I had the opportunity to instruct many different things, many different media. Another characteristic would be long hours, long hours required outside of your regular school day to satisfactorily prepare everything, prepare your lessons, complete your grading, to work, completing work for PLCs, etc. to implement new and ongoing projects, but you're never bored. I had very limited in person collaboration with peers and district art teachers. I had the privilege of seeing many students, that's another characteristic when you're the singleton. I think we've talked about this in one of the previous meetings, that you get to see students throughout their high school years, not just one and done kind of thing. And that's not all students, but then some will come back, you know, some will take it one year and then have a gap year and then come back. And oftentimes, they would still have their name on a portfolio somewhere and I can't take it out and go, Oh, you're back, great! Another characteristic of a singleton is that you have flexibility to create new lessons and units.

When asked what she felt was missing from her singleton experience Mrs. Art responded,

I know some things. I was missing the knowledge of resources within the district community. And within the surrounding city. I wish I had knowledge or a list or something a working website or something that featured, you know, this person is a ceramist. And they live down the street. I would love to have those visiting artists. I did that at the very beginning, a million years ago. And it just stopped. Financial reasons and a variety of other things. And I spoke earlier about the professional meaningful feedback relating to art, and the media use and the structural flow of the lessons in the physical classroom setting. That administrator, or general person can point out things that apply to all instructors or pick up on specific activities and actions. But for them, that's kind of surfacey for me, I would have loved to have a deeper dive into, okay, what am I missing here? Or what seems to be working in your eyes? A little bit more.

An advantage Mrs. Art described was how the challenge of being a singleton helped her grow professionally. She explained,

> Professionally, it made me work harder, and work stronger. I am now more flexible and understanding. It built my self-confidence. I really see things now as new opportunities to learn and stretch my capabilities. Because you don't have the other, you don't have a group of people. If you have a question about content, it's one thing to have a question about your computer not working, you can get help for that. But otherwise, if you're not relying on you, there's no other individual to get feedback, or immediate feedback from as quickly as you could if you had a colleague right next door who was teaching the same thing.

Mrs. Art described how being a singleton requires a lot of time and at times she felt she couldn't ask for help for fear of seeming "unknowledgeable." She explained,

> Tough, a lot of work, a lot of reading, a lot of long nights. I did have, I didn't (pause). So, it's kind of two-pronged, part of me felt that if I went and pestered someone else, I would be seen as really, I would be saying, weak, not knowledgeable, not worthy of the position. So, there in my mind that was that concern. If I speak up, they're gonna think I don't know what I'm doing. So, you use a lot of observation, you are very, you know, make sure that you've taken in what you see, oh, they're doing it that way. Okay. (But who is it that you're looking at?) Another art teacher? (Okay, so looking outside of here?) So I was fortunate enough to always have another art teacher (Even if they're not teaching the same content?) correct, in the building itself, and I knew from past experience in subbing for that individual, the quality of work that was expected and what they taught in the building. And so, I tried to live up to that. I came in, and I did not, I had never touched acrylic paint, ever. But the other instructor was painting with acrylic paint. And so, I learned by observing and looking at the artwork that was created and listening and taught myself how to paint that way. So, I kind of, you know, tried to follow the mold of that other person. As far as other things when it was just my own creative kind of things I'd seen before or stuff I had in Art Education programs and other people working in the art ed program, and their lesson plans to judge and take part or whole of what I thought would work in my own classroom. And then you also had the different curriculums, the books, you had actual publications from New York State that you could reference. So, I came out at the time that the art seventh and eighth curriculum was pretty new and fresh. They still were publishing studio in art booklets, vocabulary, lesson ideas, you name it. So that really helped give me a foundation something to start with to start with.

When asked how being a singleton affected her experiences as an educator socially, Mrs. Art responded,

> The way I can best answer that question is to say that it really depended on my age. So socially can mean like I went out and socialized with people. When I was

younger, I socialized with people in a totally different way than I socialized with people in my older life. And as you develop you find personal commonalities in your life. Oh, your kids are going to apply to college, mine is too, what are you doing? So those kinds of social connections certainly build friendships along the way that weren't because we were teaching the same thing or going to the same workshop. It was simply because we were two human beings that had similarities in our lives.

Mrs. Art responded to how does the district, colleague, community level of support for the arts impact the meaning of your teaching experience. She stated, "I think the level of support can make the singleton instructor feel included in the school. You can feel accepted by your colleagues and appreciated, or you can feel the opposite, unappreciated, you can feel isolated. And you can also fear for your job security." When asked how this applied to her experience she responded, "I think I felt all of those at different points in my career."

Mrs. Art described that a characteristic of her singleton experience was being left to find her own professional development opportunities. She explained,

> It was not common to find workshops and different things that were offered that I knew about. Certainly, it was not through the school that I became aware of those. There were a few that the curriculum coordinator or principal at the time, would discover and send our way. But most of the time, it was on our own time. But, in a way, it's nice because you have that freedom to go out if you have to, or need to, and get that. I had mixed experiences, positive and negative belonging to groups that were art teacher based. It was very rare to find lesson information for the secondary art teacher for high school. There is a lot more time, money and energy devoted to lower or younger age groups. And I'm not quite sure why that is. I don't know if it's that high school teachers are more competitive, or that it is even more singleton oriented. Because in a general art group, I'm almost thinking you have to go out and search out, you know, a group of painters or a group who specifically taught like AP (Art). I think there you might have gotten a little bit more input.

Wants

When asked what she would recommend or want provided for singleton educators Mrs. Art responded, "One of the things, I thought about, that I would like to see are suggestions for collaborating, for idea sharing, for community building with the other art teachers within my district. Other than monthly meetings, which seem to have been totally pushed to curriculum development, which was really a lot of working and not interacting." She continued,

> What has worked in other districts? What do other art departments do? Do they have a weekly little chat or a little article that they do? I really think that would definitely have helped bring our department together a little bit more. We're so

fractured. And not in a negative way. It's like buildings, you know, you're over there, you're over there. And there's really no time to get together. We do have a Monday schedule that the early release time at two o'clock for the PLCs. But we meet as a PLC not as an art department to share what we do. And that's a long time to be not sharing what you do. To share what you're doing and to have the ability to be comfortable, to talk freely amongst one another, without directives from the administration, without having to put out a (product/report) I think that's what's held us back quite a bit.

She also expressed a desire for exemplars for lessons and curriculum development she elaborated,

I need exemplars, I'm a visual person, I would love to have. And again, not saying that I don't want to appear as if I don't know how to do something, I would like to make it better. Or just get ideas for how to do other things. And I don't want to take shortcuts by taking other people's lessons. I think that's also a concern that, oh, you're just going to take my lesson plan and just duplicate it and not work on your own. So having an in-person professional development. I would love to see your nearby colleges or universities, or other districts, I know these things have happened before. And museums have a yearly workshop that explore media or curriculum, organization tips for art teachers, offered at times when teachers can attend and for a reasonable fee. And then, I touched upon it before when I said, focusing on materials and techniques that are financially realistic for limited budgets that are achievable with an entire class, and address the specific age group that you're working with. Another thing that I thought of that I would like to see, for instance, an online source or list for the art educator, websites, blogs, etc. especially when… I think any instructor would benefit by having a guide to searches so that you're not searching on your own, it can be challenging, you don't know the right word to use or the right phrase to put in so that when you're searching, you get the answers that you want. I would like to see something like that. Especially for those of us who have been teaching for a little bit longer. And we're not…sometimes it's difficult to find the newer pieces of literature pieces or materials and techniques that are currently available. I'm envisioning an individual who has just graduated with a degree, versus a person who has been working for a prolonged period of time. While there are strengths and weaknesses to both of those extremes. And I feel like there should be something given to these people. A list of free resources for new and upcoming instructors, that could be disseminated to all. I know that it kind of sounds a little silly. But I also would like to have, especially with the New York State learning standards, I would love to have yearly follow up workshops. I feel that the website is very lacking. I think they have developed wonderful things in writing. But I don't see a lot of follow through.

Summary

Mrs. Art grew up in a rural community like Appleton with rolling hills and farm country. Her school district was spread out and served a population twice the size of Appleton. Like Appleton her home district was located near an urban center. She reported that the district population was diverse and the approach to teaching and learning progressive.

Mrs. Art described her parents as being supportive of her creativity. Her mom was a music teacher and her father an electrician. She noted that her "teaching gene" came from her mother's side of the family and her skills with tools and making came from her father. She credits her art teachers for encouraging her talents and inspiring her to pursue art and teaching. Following this example, Mrs. Art pursued art in college and developed her own art making skills before continuing on to earn her teaching degree. She began her career in a district similar to Appleton then spent the rest of her teaching career serving as a Jr/Sr high school visual arts teacher at Appleton.

Early in her career, Mrs. Art described having a fear of asking for help and guidance, thinking that this might give the impression that she was somehow incompetent or unknowledgeable. She described carefully observing art colleagues to learn technique and presentation. She researched extensively to gain information and resources for her classroom. She noted that although the district at one time had a curriculum coordinator for many years, she was tasked with developing curriculum on her own. When the district did provide this assistance with curriculum development, she found this resource to be extremely helpful. Time, structure, access to examples, and guidance all made this process "so easy" with this support.

Mrs. Art described time, being responsible for materials, budgeting, grading, technology, promoting your program, advocacy, lesson preparation and curriculum planning, research, access to professional development outside of school, and misconceptions about what art teachers do as being challenges of her job. In addition, she identified that being a singleton means that you deal with these challenges essentially on your own, making your job at times lonely and frustrating. Among the personal skills she identified were self-motivation, inquisitiveness, creativity, resourcefulness, hardworking and observant. Skills she identified she had developed as a singleton included organization, resiliency, self-advocacy, self-motivation, problem-solving, and research and life-long learning.

Mrs. Art identified advantages to working in a small community as being able to get to know your students and getting the opportunity see them grow over the years. She noted that the Appleton community was more connected than the community where she grew up sharing in local celebrations and customs. She enjoyed the freedom that came with being a singleton. She could choose her own lessons and follow her own inspiration for teaching and engaging her students. Although she did not have another teacher who specifically taught the same content as her, she identified that working in a small building created other structural kinds of commonalities such as access to resources and the school facilities. As time passed, Mrs. Art developed her reputation and the reputation of the art program by displaying student work and

demonstrating the standard of achievement and skills she was teaching in the art room. She also described instances of finding other ways to connect to colleagues, outside of art, socially and professionally through conversations about student needs and family.

Finally, Mrs. Art provided what she identified as wants and needs for singleton art teachers. She stated that although she and her art colleagues at Appleton had assigned PLC time, these meetings did not allow time for community building among this group. She identified time where these content peers could share examples of what was happening in their classrooms and collaborate as a district wide team could make these educators feel less isolated. She expressed a need for a central source for communication of information regarding opportunities for art professional development and professional development that presented lessons and materials that are financially practical in a classroom setting. She identified that opportunities for arts educators within and across districts to gather and have in-person conversations about what they are doing in their classrooms and share lesson exemplars and resources would help offset the isolation of singleton-ness and create community.

Nina's Story ~ American Nation School - Appleton Central School District

Teacher Background Demographics

Nina (pseudonym) is an elementary art teacher in the Appleton Central School District (pseudonym) in upstate New York. She has been teaching in the district for two years. Nina teaches visual arts to students in grades Pre-K through eighth grade at the American Indian Nation School (AINS, pseudonym) which is part of the Appleton Central School District. She is the only art teacher in her building.

Prior to teaching at AINS, Nina has taught as both art teacher and special education teacher at various districts in the area. She worked for BOCES (Board of Cooperative Educational Serves) for five years as a special education teacher and then taught in the local public city schools as an art teacher traveling between buildings in the district. She explained,

> I took a job at BOCES. And then I took a job at a local college and then I hip hopped around all over the place. And then, I finally felt like the dust around everything settled and there were positions open. So, it took me a long time to get here because of the fact, I think, that there's a lot more schools here that have one art teacher. Like, when I worked for the city, I worked between two schools every day, one on the east side and one on the west side. Thirty minutes of driving every single day between schools. Yeah, and that's how it had to be there, we're here. This is an amazing job. I'm not going anywhere.

Nina also taught at two other districts before accepting the position at AINS. All of Nina's teaching positions were working with elementary and middle school aged students. Nina remarked that it is hard for her to pinpoint how long she has been teaching. She explained, "Um, I have been teaching art workshops here and there forever, so that's why I never know what to write for how long I've been teaching. Since I was really little." Nina has been a practicing artist and teacher for most of her life she remarked, "I've been teaching on the side with everything for a long time."

When asked why she became a teacher, Nina responded, "Um, (laughs) so I became an art teacher because my family was like, you should be a nurse. And I was like, no, then went off and did my own thing… I just wanted to do what I wanted to do." Nina shared that teaching was in her family she stated, "I always knew that I wanted to be a teacher. My mother was a teacher, my father was a teacher. So, I decided I loved art too much to not do that."

Although Nina grew up in the city, she attended a private Catholic school where a favorite teacher created a space where she felt welcomed and facilitated her interest in art. She explained,

> In high school, I had an art teacher. Her name was Rhonda Bertolini Henderson. And she was the most supportive, fantastic, amazing human I've ever met. She let

me sit in that room all day, all day. I'm surprised I didn't fail. So, it was just one of those things. So, when I went on, I was like, I want to make other people feel the way this woman helped me to get through high school. High school is tough for everybody. So yes, that was why I decided to do that in the first place. But I also found art to be extremely therapeutic. And that, I think, was the number one thing too when I (was) starting to get into it.

Nina noted that her school did not have a lot of art offerings. She explained,

So, there wasn't like photography or anything. I think they have it now. But back in the 90s, they did not. I remember we petitioned for a photography class. And they gave us, like, remember when you had your hands in the bags, there was no dark room. That's how low functioning it was. They didn't have ceramics or anything like that. It was just drawing and painting, all the way through. When I went into college, I started learning how to do other things. And I failed miserably at quite a few things and stuck with drawing and painting. Because that's what I knew.

After attending a local college, Nina moved to Buffalo and studied Art Education, earning her teaching degree. When asked if her art education program offered any instruction specifically in rural education or working in small districts Nina responded, "No. I had to, we did all of our like, whatever you call them practicum hours or whatever, in the city schools of Buffalo. After that my two placements (were) one was in Cheektowaga, which is humongous. And the other one was in Lancaster, which would be, I guess, considered a suburban school, you know, 1000s of students." Before teaching at AINS, Nina's experience was mostly in city or larger suburban school districts. She noted that when she was teaching in the city school district she taught "middle school and then Pre-K-one." She explained, "So, I was at one school in the morning doing one sixth, seventh, and eighth. But then I was at another school in the afternoon where I did middle school rotation and a Pre-K-one rotation." She commented, "I love the younger grades, (and) I actually really do enjoy middle school."

When asked to compare the AINS community to where she grew up, she explained,

It's the literal opposite, I think. I grew up in the city. And there isn't really, even though it's a city, and you would think that it would have a little bit more community, there's much more community here. But again, I don't know how to say, like, on the reservation, that everybody's here with similarities, whereas where I grew up in the city was extremely diverse, extremely diverse. Where I live now, even though I live on the outskirts of the city, there's still next to me a group home. And then behind me is a set of apartments. So, like, that is more diverse than here. And I'm still considered like, within the city, where I am now. So, very different.

Nina identified that AINS "feels like the school that I had gone to, being that I didn't go to the city school." She also described how the school facilities at AINS "feel like" the school that she attended where the building was showing wear and tear. She explained, "I have yet to be in a school that's either pretty rural or fairly urban, that doesn't show its age." She continued,

> But this has the feel of the schools where I was, and it was the feel of the schools, the environment, interior. So, with that, when I go to schools, where people are like, oh, I have this and this and this, I'm like, what, how? So that does make a difference. And I think it does make you feel a little jaded. Because people will be like, oh, my goodness, you don't have a, b, and c, and I'm like, how do you even get a, b, and c? Like, how does that even happen? Normal people don't have that. Maybe they do.

When asked, did you find it (the building condition and resources) to be the case for both the urban environment and for the rural environment Nina responded,

> Yes. I think the urban environment is a lack of maybe, it all comes down to, I think, a lack of funding in certain areas. So, in the city, the funding is going towards meeting literal basic needs. Out here. Maybe it is too, but it seems like there's a (pause), when I worked in the city, each child was receiving a much higher fund per student than here. In the city, each child is (allocated) probably as much funding as what my children get in a suburban school. But it's going to different things. So yes, the art room (in the city) was stocked with your basic needs. But beyond that, not much, not much.

Personal Artmaking

Nina has been a practicing artist for all her adult life. She stated, "I do paintings. I have a website and I used to do a lot of the marketing like selling my prints and on bags and this and that. I kind of stepped away from that because it got really exhausting during the school year to try to keep up with all those things. So, I stopped. I may get back into it for summers, but I'm not right now."

She is active in several art communities and meets regularly with fellow artists. She teaches workshops and exhibits her work two or three times a year at a venue in the city and exhibits at local libraries. Nina described how it helps her as a teacher to interact with practicing artists. She explained, "And it also helps, I think, I honestly think, sometimes it's better to talk to other artists than it is to other art teachers. I mean, that in the kindest way." She explained,

> Like, I have a friend Ken, who does these very Keith Haring-like drawings. You'll see them all over the city. His drawings are very stylized. And talking to him is very awakening because I forget how refreshing it is to (pause) you feel like in education it's like how do you problem solve? Whereas with art, it's like, what do you see? It's just two different viewpoints on the world. And as an art educator,

it's very different because, you know, it's how do I see things and how do I want them to be exposed to these things?"

Nina meets monthly with another group. She described the perspective this group brings to her teaching. She stated, "We meet once a month and draw together okay. It's called Java and Draw. We meet at different coffee houses together. Yeah. But like one of the girls is like a printmaker. That's her job. One of the girls is a bookbinder, so like meeting all these different people who do all these different things, I think really opened your eyes and reinvigorates."

Teaching Philosophy

When asked to share her teaching philosophy, Nina explained,

I, for here, because you're going to, I think, as a teacher, you need to be humble and fluid. You really do, especially when you're going from one environment to a different one. The one thing that I'm trying to work with, with my kids, not only do I look at art, therapeutically, which probably stems from how I took in art as I was younger. Art is everything. Art is all things, it is your haircut, it is your shoes, it is the cars that you hope that you get when you turn sixteen. It is all of those things, it is your, it's deep rooted in the culture here, and how can you say things without having to use words all the time? And that's kind of where I stand with this group. What do you want to say? This is a group that's been hushed for a very long time. So, what do you need to say? How do you want to say it? What skills do you need to move forward? And yes, many of these skills are our baseline. Like, I teach K -2 how to do large paper weaving. And then you move into this one (points to project) so that by the time they're in eighth grade, they're accustomed to creating their own. They have to sew their own graduation outfit. How do you get that skill set growing up?

When asked specifically about what she wants for this set of children in this community she stated,

The kids, I want them to realize that they are important! That is pretty much the number one thing? How are we responding as a group of contemporary Indigenous artists? What do we (the students) want to say? Right now, they're creating skateboards, and they're doing an absolutely fabulous job. (She asks her students.) What is it that you need to say? What are you saying, how are you going to go about that? And I think, you know, going back to where we are, is always like the epicenter, like, where are we? How did these people, what happened historically, and culturally to them over the span of many, many decades, and years?

Part of Nina's philosophy includes her vision of art as therapy. She has researched this topic and sees her classroom as a place where students can come "hang out" and develop life

skills. She described wanting her classroom to be a sanctuary for students and related this back to her own experiences as an art student and how the art room was her sanctuary.

Teaching Environment

According to census data, the community of Appleton Central School District is identified as Rural (41) Fringe and Rural (42) Distant (Census.gov). The main campus is located ten miles from an urban center with a population of approximately 150,000 people (Census.gov) and is in the town of Appleton. Appleton has a population of 4,842 +/- 353 residents (Census.gov.). The Appleton Central School District is comprised of the American Indian Nation Pre-K through eighth grade school, another Pre-K through sixth grade elementary school, a middle/junior/senior high school, and a secondary (alternative) high school. The district total enrollment is 739 students, Pre-K through twelfth grade (data.nysed.gov). The 2022-23 AIN school enrollment was 122 students (data.nysed.gov).

The AIN school is located approximately eight miles to the south of the district's main campus and second elementary school and approximately three miles outside of an urban center to the north. The school building is a single structure housing facilities for grades Pre-K though eight grade and is in the AIN village center. You enter the building into a circular gathering space that opens above into two stories to reveal a sky light area. The classrooms on both levels are located down halls that finger off from this central area. The art classroom is located through the cafeteria and down a hallway away from the main areas of the building. Nina stated, "I am alone, alone. There are no other rooms down here. I'm the only one."

You enter the art room into a large space that spans three large working areas. There is a bathroom and single sink area at one end, a middle area set up with classroom tables and stools, and a gathering area with a Promethean board at the other end. The facing wall is lined with windows. Nina's desk is set up in the middle area of the room. At the far end of the room a door opens into another large "storage" space with a utility sink and shelving. There is a wall that divides the space into two storage areas, both cluttered with miscellaneous materials and scraps left over from the previous teacher. Nina explained how she has been working on cleaning up the space and organizing materials, often during her personal time. Nina points out the shelves where she has started to organize art materials. When Nina accepted the position the classroom space was much different. She explained,

> So, just last year, this room had those metal cabinets. When I came into the space, there were sixteen of those cabinets, just all lined up all around. And the tables were half the size. And they were just kind of like randomly placed all around the room. There was no flow. I feel like there's still not great flow but better and it's much cleaner. They said you're getting new floors and you're getting your walls fixed up, because my walls were, like, blue. Those were the tables (points). So, they were like, you have a grant for tables, we got (new) tables and chairs. And

they were like, you're getting (new) floors and walls. And I said, just get rid of all of those cabinets. I will find a way to make it all work because it was just overwhelming for me. So, I can't even imagine how it felt to be like a four-year-old trying to walk in here and stuff. So yeah, but my backroom is all storage. So, when I say I'm not going anywhere. I mean it because I'm very lucky in that aspect.

When describing the condition of her classroom Nina commented,

This is a state building. And so, there's different state funding that comes in. I'm not really sure how things get moved about. I can tell you that this building, compared to the other two, looks like it was the forgotten child. The high school is beautiful, and amazing and phenomenal. And I don't even have screens for my windows. I literally had a dog jump into my room. (Laughs) So, I guess that kind of explains it. And I have to have the heat and the window open at all times, or you will either freeze or sweat. You can't plan.

When asked to describe how the classroom space functions for her teaching Nina explained,

Depends on what's happening. My Pre-K and kindergarteners do rotations. So, I use the whole space. I have some flexible seating, some standing desks and space for sitting on the floor or at a table. We have tables, one, two, and three, I try to integrate the language as much as much as possible. So, for my little ones, they would do stations 1, 2, and 3. And then they can do something on the floor. My older kids, so say junior high, they're doing these (points to wooden skateboard forms on a table), they just kind of come in, they find a spot wherever they're comfortable. I don't care if they lay on the floor as long as they're doing work. I feel like I have it set up as best as possible. This used to be the cafeteria. So, it is a little weird. But my classroom literally goes all the way to the end of the building. It's like massive, massive.

Scheduling

Nina has been at the AIN school now for two years. This years' experience is much different than last year's. Nina indicated that she was close to not returning to the AIN school this year due to her experience with the last principal. The school has since changed principals and this year has been much better according to Nina. She feels valued and supported by her current principal, although he too will be leaving at the end of the school year. Nina described the challenges of last year and the schedule she was asked to keep. She explained,

AIN school is on its second principal, soon to be third principal. So, like the influx of different systems is very odd, compared to last year. The last principal had me, I was very close to not staying here, because of what she saw as important, and because she saw me as being just a warm body that didn't need to

do anything, no planning, no prep, no nothing. So, I was teaching a math circle and ELA circle. I was doing an hour of recess duty every day. I was doing lunch duty. I literally had fifteen minutes to myself, and I had to fight for those fifteen minutes during my lunch, because she just saw me as being like, well, you don't have anything on your schedule during this time. So, I'm going to put you in second grade, I'm going to put you in fourth grade, I'm going to put you in kindergarten. It was like the minute I got in until the minute I was done. I did not do as much as I wish that I could have done last year (in art) due to the fact that I was seen as just kind of being, you know, a warm body because the arts aren't as valued as a lot of other things.

When it came to describing her new schedule, Nina laughed. She stated,

The previous art teacher was like, I was there eighteen years, and I had eighteen different schedules and routines. It's very, I feel like that's kind of their thing. They're still trying to figure out what works. Right now, we're on a five-day rotation. And I see Pre-K, kindergarten, and second grade, two times a week. I see all the rest of them, one time every five days. Yeah, I have "open room." This would typically be like an open room where kids can come in and just to catch up and stuff. And I do after school art. The classes are 45 minutes each. Except on Monday, because we have a PLC group. So, the kids leave at 1:45.

The class sizes range from nine to twenty-four. Nina described a bit about the challenges of small class sizes and student absences. She explained,

I feel like twenty-four is a good number to be honest with you. They can work well together. They can use supplies more. It's just a different dynamic. I had a group last year of three. And when there was one of them out, I was like, ahh. (Laughs) I want to slowly start moving the middle school kids into more of like a TAB (Teaching for Artistic Behaviors) art class.

TAB allows for more student choice in learning and is well suited for asynchronous instruction. Because of the nature of this learning community Nina sees a benefit in adapting her curriculum to a more flexible structure. She explained how the older students participate in cultural ceremonies, and this causes them to miss school. She explained how this affects her schedule and instruction as well as that of the other subjects,

And then you have to take into account that here the older kids go to ceremonies more. So, we had our holiday break, we had a week off. But then when we came back, it was called Midwinter Ceremonies here. So, I didn't see the kids for three more weeks. I didn't see them for a whole month. So, there are a lot of times where, and to me, I'm glad they're going and learning these things. And that's important, too. I just wish they could come here more. They also missed a month of social studies, science, and math. They need those things, too.

When asked about the PLC days she responded, "I didn't even know that that was a part of it. And then the first Monday that I worked and they're like, okay, the kids are going home. I'm like, it's only 1:45pm. So, I had no idea that any of that was happening." She noted how she appreciated the PLC time because it connected her with the other teachers in the district. As noted earlier the AINS is in the AIN village eight miles from the other district schools. Nina described how the PLC schedule changes allowing her to meet with the elementary, middle and Jr/Sr high school teachers. She stated, "PLC is every Monday, but it rotates. So, like, this this week we met as a team school. Just your school. So then next month, Monday, I would go up to the high school and I meet with all the art teachers and the music teachers. But last year, we met with the art teachers, the music teachers, and the gym teachers, but only elementary." She continued, "It's like constantly being changed. This one's nice because it feels like I'm actually connected with the other schools more." She noted, "I love the PLC group. And if I didn't have that PLC group, I would feel much more uneasy about things."

Because the American Indian Nation School is part of a larger Six Nations community. Students from any of the Six Nations may attend the AIN school. Additionally, native students who live within the district have the option of attending the AIN school or the other elementary school within the district. Nina explained, "Any of the Six Nations and outside are allowed to come here. But if you don't want to, you can go to the other elementary school which is in the Appleton district, it's another pre-K-six (school), and then you go to the 7-12 High School. But kids can go here until sixth grade, and then go to the junior/senior high school if they want to. So, our junior high program here is very small. I think we only have a dozen seventh graders." Nina continued to explain, "And then everybody meshes together. And they all go to the high school."

Nina expressed her concern with preparing her students to go on to the 7-12 high school setting. She explained that this transition can be difficult for some students since they have not attended school with the other students in the Appleton district prior to merging into the high school setting. She described how she has been "working on" how to develop perseverance with her students through their art learning. She explained,

> And that, again, is something that I've been working on as a singleton art teacher, in this environment, wanting to, you know, prepare your students. I mean, because maybe you've seen the decline in perseverance. I've watched the decline of perseverance over the past five years, like my kids, the minute something's hard, she's like, well, can I give up? And I think a big thing is that they, they're down here on the reservation, they have a very small family structure here. They come to a very small school, and all of a sudden, they're thrown into ninth grade, and they don't know what they're doing. There are so many unknowns, that it scares them, and then they give up. And so, trying to correlate as a single art teacher with another single art teacher, to give our kids the pathway to success has been another hurdle that, you know, I think is going to take me a while.

What Nina described here is a need to coordinate with the other elementary art teacher to make sure the curriculum "correlates" across schools to ensure her AIN students are prepared with the skills and knowledge they need to transition onto the high school learning community. Scheduling plays a role in this as well as collaboration and curriculum development, since the AINS students can enter the Jr/Sr high school in either seventh, eighth, or ninth grade.

Budget

Nina described her budget, "I have been given $4000, which is good and decent that is very, very, in my opinion, very good. Although, when I spoke with the art teacher that was here before me, it has been $4,000 since she started, which would be 20 years ago. It has not changed." She continued,

> So, you're just given a budget in June, and you have until June 30 to order everything. The principal, the one that you met, is very, very hands off. He figures you're a professional. You know what you need to do. I know we're hiring a new principal, but I'm hoping that he is able to stay on because he's very supportive of the arts. I should say, he's not even very supportive. He's the most supportive that I've ever had. So, I would like for him to stay for that. There are your basic pieces that you always need to get, all your markers and your papers and stuff. But sometimes, I'll get like a whole set of tempera cakes or something new. My kiln has been broken since last year. I don't know how to fix it. The kiln (points) is literally sitting behind my desk. So that kind of stinks. And they're kind of just like, well, unless you can fix it, you got to put it in the budget.

Nina indicated that she felt the budget was sufficient for her instructional needs. She has shifted the curriculum towards two-dimensional art since this is her area of expertise. The previous teacher had done a lot with three-dimensional art and ceramics. When she started, Nina had the school remove the steel cabinets that were cluttering the classroom space. Unfortunately, the contractors misinterpreted the instructions and threw away not only the cabinets but the materials that were inside. Nina explained,

> We had an incident here, for full clarity. When they decided, when I said I wanted to get rid of the cabinets. They threw out every single thing in the cabinet. Yeah, so they threw out probably $30,000 of supplies, which you know, as an art teacher, it took a long time to build that up. I just sat on the floor and cried because they threw away like, all my clay rolling pins. They threw away my slab roller. Everything. But they didn't know. It was an outside company putting in the floors, or whatever. And so, it was heartbreaking. And I lost a lot. But I was like, well, maybe it's, you know, some sort of strange blessing in disguise. And now I'm basically here, and I have to make projects that work. But it makes you really think, like, hey, what do these kids need moving forward?

Nina also has an older iPad cart that she maintains and shares with the other classroom teachers. She explained, "I have an iPad cart. But I don't have enough iPads to go around for each kid. And then the other problem is none of the other teachers have an iPad cart. So, being a small school (teachers ask) can I borrow five iPads today? Can I borrow your whole cart? So, a lot of times teachers come down and off they go, and you know, you can't say no, because they're not really mine. They're for the kids." Additionally, Nina has had to track down iPads that have been "taken home" by students.

Nina also described how the Promethean board in her room had a black line running through it. The IT technicians investigated it, and her board is an older model and had been used in every classroom in the building. When she asked if it could be replaced, she was told no. In Nina's classroom there is also a school access printer. Although this is a great art room resource, it brings students and faculty into her room randomly throughout the day to retrieve their prints.

Curriculum

Nina described how "the teacher who was here before me, she's now the teacher at the high school. She did a ton of ceramics. So, these kids are now flipping the switch going from sculpture to 2D work. So, it's very different." Nina described how she is building a curriculum while navigating the nuances and traditions of the local culture. She explained, "So, I'm kind of building a curriculum on my own and trying to be aware of a culture that I'm not a part of. And a history that I'm not a part of. So, trying to understand those, and my place in it without being privileged in that way. And then following, you know, the elements of art and the basic skills that the children need." She has reached out to the other elementary art teacher about curriculum development across schools, but described that "at the other elementary school, she's all holidays, and things like that. I'm like, stop doing the holiday stuff, but she won't." Nina explained how she has put in many hours researching and writing lesson plans. She continued, "and then writing a lesson, that's always the worst, most time-consuming part, writing, and writing, and writing." She has subscribed to a paid curriculum service to help her generate lessons for her younger students. She stated, "I pay for one right of my own pocket, to help me with the little guys. Because if they're going through so many lessons per class, you're going to be spending, you know, I don't know about you, but twenty-five minutes per lesson writing it up. That's so much time just writing. So, I kind of follow that curriculum and just print out what they have, that I find useful for like a beginner art student."

Nina indicated that the district does "subscribe" to Art of Education and the resources they have available for art teachers. She stated, "I never use it (for curriculum). I only use it for training. But the high school teachers use that a lot. Which is great because I feel like it covers what needs to happen there. I always forget about that one."

The Appleton district did participate in a curriculum initiative prior to Nina coming to work there that evaluated the arts learning standards and the districts' arts curriculum. Nina

indicated that she was aware of the district's curriculum work and shared that they provided her with the documents from their standards work. She explained,

> What they gave me was pretty much when they did the unpacking the standards. I was like, well, I already have done this. When I talked to the high school teachers, I'm like, what are the seventh, eighth, ninth graders coming in (with) that they don't know, that you wish that they knew? And us, as elementary teachers, should look at that and be like, okay, what can we do? Why are they not prepared? And, you know, it's always how to read a ruler, how to use a protractor, you know, those sorts of things, stuff that like, a lot of it is math. I do a whole section of math art in fourth and fifth grade, but they're Agamographs and things like that.

Nina compared her experience with curriculum development at AINS to her experience at the city school where she worked. She explained,

> I would have liked if our program had more lineage. But that's just me. The city school district, in my opinion did it right. All four teachers needed to teach these couple of artists in any way that you (the teachers) want to or use these couple of mediums in any way you want to. So, by the time all these kids filtered out into all the different high schools, they all had this basic knowledge. Whereas I look at the other art teacher in the elementary school, in the middle school, and I go, did you teach this? And they said no. I'm like, should we teach this? And they said, I don't know. I'm like, I feel like we should.

Nina is a new teacher in this district and is new to this community of learners. She expressed her dedication to preparing her students for their transition into junior/senior high school and being aware and supportive of their native culture. She explained that she has reached out to fellow teachers to help guide her curriculum development. She explained,

> So, I do reach out to the previous teacher a little bit. And I talked to a lot of the people who are established here in the community to figure out what it is that, you know, what holds cultural significance here. So, for example, the past two years in May I do an art show featuring strawberries. Strawberries are very important here. We do a whole art show, the whole school does something with strawberries, and then I bring it to the local library, and I put it all up in there. But I didn't know that until I talked to someone here noting that everybody seems to have strawberries on something, cups and stuff like that, they're like, super important. I'm like, but again, you don't know what you don't know. So, a lot of those things were a learning curve for me. We just finished up with Pre-K, our third art activity that had to do with their clan, figuring out what is your clan and different things. And we're doing these fish (points to stack of artwork) based off of an anniversary of a story that they know, that's been around for a really long time.

Nina is aware that the development of trust takes time. She described how she has been working to develop relationship with the teachers and community members to help her develop

meaningful and effective lessons for her students. When asked if she had community members she could reach out to, she responded,

> There's no one here yet. But the resources in the building are strong. We do have a clan mother that works here in the building. One of the other teachers, the special education teacher, has been here twenty plus years, he's a great resource. Our social worker is very, very involved in the community. And they're very open to me being like, hey, if I do this, what do you think? When I decided to do the fish, I went and talked to our culture teacher, and I'm like, Bob, tell me about this. And he's like, I think it's wonderful. So, a lot of times I can go there. And I feel like the more I learn and experience, the better. It's moving forward. I'm hoping.

Nina commented on her being a non-native art teacher she stated, "I was very surprised that they hired a non-native art teacher. The woman before me was native. She's at the high school, which I think is fabulous because now they have someone up there. But I don't think anybody who applied was (native). So, they really didn't have a lot of choices." In this position, Nina described not only navigating the challenges of teaching the requirements of the arts standards but also navigating her responsibility to respect and support the native traditions and culture of her students. Nina described how in focusing on what her students want and need to communicate, giving them the opportunity to no longer be "hushed", she hopes to help them develop resiliency and prepare them for the transition into Appleton's 7-12 high school.

Access

Nina's room is in a hallway off from the cafeteria. To access her room, one must walk through the cafeteria and enter the hallway that leads to her door. Her hallway is not attached to the other parts of the building other than via the cafeteria. She described it as "strange, but good, but not good." She noted, "I am alone, alone. There are no other rooms down here. I'm the only one." When asked how often she sees the other teachers she responded, "Only when they're dropping their kids off. Across the hall is the IT guy, but they're from BOCES. And then over there is our food pantry. So, that's about it. They drop their kids off or if they come down, I mean, my room's typically doors open. People are shuffling in and out. So, I see more people in that realm than I do anything else. And I try to make myself accessible and out the hallway too, so I'm not forgotten. (Laughs)" Nina's room has a school printer in it that teachers and students often need to access.

Nina has a lunch duty with the Pre-K and kindergarten children every day. Since her schedule changes, she does not adhere to a regular lunch schedule. Rather, she fits her lunchtime in where she can during the day. She explained that the teachers' room is on the other side of the building. She stated, "It's all the way down, through the library, like on the other side of the building." Nina compares this situation to others she has experienced. She described,

This, this building is great. I have, I don't know. I don't really have anything (pause) like it may sound like it's not, well, but it's me that's not going up there. The people here are great. Like, I can go you know. They do Wellness Wednesdays where we all have like, you know, you wear your comfy clothes. Everybody is in like comfy clothes, and they have tea in the breakroom, or they have free coffee, free doughnuts. There's a big feeling of inclusion in this building. And it is really nice. I mean, you know, at one of the other schools where I've been previously almost all the specials' teachers had lunch at the same time. And you had to take rotations of who sat down because there weren't enough chairs. You had to sit on the windowsill because there were, you know, six chairs and thirty-five people trying to take lunch at the same time. It was terrible. I'd much rather deal with this than that.

Nina described students' access to her classroom. She explained,

So, I have. I mean, it all depends on. (pause) So, I have two mentees. We have a teacher-student mentorship program here, that all teachers do, and I'm not sure if it's, I don't think it's required, we just do it to build relationships with the kids. So, I have a middle school mentee and an elementary one. So, two days out of the week, I have lunch with them. They just come down here and we just have lunch, or we find a time to just play board games together, whatever kids are able to come in and kind of do. That's why there's all that cardboard (points), they kind of do whatever they want to do. They come in and, you know, they make stuff, then they create things, and they look around. I don't even care, like one girl was having a rough week, she was just taking those pillows, putting them underneath there (points to under a table) and just hanging out, just quiet. And that's what she needed. And that was fine. So, it really does depend on the week. We have a nature trail back there. Sometimes we'll just go walk the nature trail together. It varies and is flexible.

School and Community Support

Nina described the district PLC as one of her main sources of support. She described how having regular meeting times to interact with her art colleagues in the district was valuable and made her feel less "lonely." She explained,

And very luckily, we have the PLC with every other week meeting with the art department. So, I think that in all honesty, Appleton does it extremely well. When I was at the city school district, I was the middle school teacher. And then there was an elementary teacher and we actually saw each other one time in one whole school year. So that was just as, I think, lonely as not having anybody there at all. Because I think when it comes down to it, I think the size of the school matters just as much as being the only singleton teacher. So, you know, it's nice. I do a lot of connecting with people (here). But again, I'm very, very lucky that I have such a small school that I'm able to, you know, go up to the math teacher and be like, hey, I see the kids are struggling with math. Would you like to do some math art

projects? The high school art teacher and I just had a little conversation over break. And we were talking about, you know, math and rulers and how it's been a difficult time for her. And so we were, I was like, well, I'm going to teach seventh and eighth grade this project at the end of the year about rulers, what do you think she's like, oh, yeah, let's do that. So, I'm able to connect easier because I have a set planning time. I'm able to meet them for PLCs and things along those lines. So, Appleton does it well. Being a multiple art teacher in a bigger district was actually more difficult with connections than being a singleton art teacher and a smaller district. If that makes sense. And you know, I'm sure if I was in an area where I didn't have those PLC groups and I didn't have an opportunity to see the high school teacher or the other elementary school teacher on a monthly basis. It would feel very odd in the aspect that like, you know, I'm here on an island by myself.

Although Nina described how helpful it is to have regular PLC meetings with her content peers and she appreciates that Appleton makes time for teachers to get together as a district, she also described how the support can be inconsistent since everyone is "busy" and "comfortable" in their curriculum. Nina expressed how she would like to know what the other art teachers are teaching so she can plan and scaffold her curriculum. When asked if the other teachers have expressed a willingness to communicate what their lessons are she responded, "No, no, of course not." She did note that they were collaborating on a project they learned about through Art of Ed. And was pleased that they were working on that together. She explained,

The Art of Ed had this, like, training of a collaborative piece that everybody decided that they wanted to do together. And that was nice. And that's great. But beyond that, every time I pop into a room, I'm like, oh, what a surprise. Like what you're teaching, I have no idea. I wish, I'm not asking any of them to be like, hey, you know, what do you do? Share your lessons or your slides with me or whatever it is. But like, I sent this neat art lesson to one of the Jr/Sr high school teachers. And I said, hey, you know, where are you with optical art? Like, you know, it falls into math really great. And we're talking about this whole ruler thing. What do you think? That was a month ago and I've heard absolutely nothing. It's like, yeah, again, to the communication and stuff. I feel like you're stronger when you can communicate, and I get that everybody's busy. But if I can reach out, I work three jobs. I have two kids. I'm taking classes. I'm very busy too. But I value that. And I feel like they're very comfortable.

Nina described how she gets a lot of her support and inspiration for her teaching outside of school. She explained,

I find a lot of my inspiration and support from not at school. I find a lot of stuff strangely, through like through the groups of artists that I work with outside of the community. I have a friend who is a printmaker, and she was like, I really would like to teach you this and then maybe, you know, you can move on and use it in your own artwork. And then if I use it in my own artwork, and then maybe I could teach that at school. Um, and honestly, social media is, sadly, very big. I go on there, and I'm like, oh, look, there's a bookbinding class for free. I'm gonna go

there. There's an Empowered Educators Zoom meeting next week, I'm gonna go on there. And that is, you know, seeing other art teachers on like, Instagram, or being on groups and Facebook, Pinterest, all of those things, helped me to figure out where to get my inspiration from because if I'm not inspired, it's gonna be boring.

When describing support from the district and her principal, Nina stated, "He supports me with what I want to do, but he's not actively being like, hey, Nina, look at this awesome training that just popped through. I didn't have any principal that has ever done anything like that. It's more so learning. I learned more from the music teacher about different opportunities when it comes to our group, than I do anywhere else." She continued, "So yeah, I find a lot more on my own. It's not that it's not that our district isn't supportive in learning. It's I think there's just other things that they're more concerned with."

Nina described how singleton teachers can "get comfortable" and "be in their own little bubble." She continued, "Only, you know, you gotta have a form of selfishness in order to survive. But you also, it's really hard to get out of that as a singleton art teacher, to make connections with other people." Nina makes connections through her involvement in artist communities as a practicing artist. She described an upcoming art exhibit for students that she brought forward to her colleagues. When she mentioned it, they were surprised by her knowledge of the show and "art connections." She explained, "And they're like, oh my God, you have such connections. I'm like, I don't, this is literally in our general area, what's happening around us. And it wasn't even that hard to find that information." Being an active seeker of information and also having a connection to the city's art community is an asset Nina brings to the group. It is also a resource for her personal support for art teaching.

Additionally, Nina seeks out professional development support in other areas such as the BOCES sponsored art education offerings. She described how the substitute teacher situation has made it difficult to get to in-person BOCES workshops this year. She stated, "Unfortunately, for like the Arts Leadership, it would be like me, tech, music. If one of us is out, we kind of try to cover each other. If all three of us were out, I feel like the entire building would deflate. Like it would just not be good." AINS does not use the BOCES sub service. The school relies upon people from the community to cover for teachers when they are absent. Nina explained,

So, a lot of times it's someone's auntie coming in and covering a class. First of all, they are way more dedicated than OCM BOCES. Some, most of these people are related. When I was substitute teaching, they called me for art jobs because I have a degree. So, I was able to cover that. And then I can be like, no, I don't want to go into a PE, you know, so I could deny them. Whereas these people, the people who are coming in and covering these classes are just kind of like wandering around just doing whatever they're being told. So, I'm not going to leave them like

massive lessons. So, most of my training this year has been either virtual, or like book studies and things like that.

Nina described the school and community as being supportive of the children creating art. She described "family night" which is held three times a year where she has facilitated "a little art project" and these events when held at the school are very well attended. She explained, "Everybody's there when we have socials, lots of parent involvement, even if I'm just there interacting with them, getting to know them, that sort of stuff. I tried to do art openings, like little, like, meet and greet type thing." When Nina tried to engage the community through art shows at the local public library, only 4.5 miles from the school, "No one shows up. You know, I don't know if it's because it's too far away. I've tried different things. During our opening weekend or during the week, like it just doesn't get that level of involvement." She compared the community engagement from AINS to the other schools in the district. Nina described,

> They had an art and library, or something like that, night at the high school last year. And it had a ton of kids from the other elementary school and the Jr/Sr high school and zero from the AIN school. So, you know, the level of involvement, it depends on I think, basically, you know, I don't know if it's where it is, if they're (not) comfortable. I really, I don't know. I'm hoping that when I do my art show for the kids at the Gear Factory, that I can get some people down there, but I'm not keeping my hopes up. I'm expecting more from the neighboring community than from here.

Nina is new to this school and this community. She described her desire to learn about the AIN culture and values and integrate these values into her art instruction. She has learned that she must take her time and build those relationships. She described her frustration,

> One of the pieces that's been something I feel like, you know, the hamsters on the little wheels and they're running superfast but they're not going anywhere. My mountain to climb is that I'm not native. The last art teacher who was here, for I think she said 18 years, she was part of the community. She was part of the longhouse. She grew up on the nation, her family is still there. And before her was someone similar to me, someone who grew up in the city, you know, maybe didn't have ties or roots in the community. Being expected to achieve artistically cultural lessons without having a anyone to help me learn, because you don't know what you don't know, is, it's basically like a hamster running on a wheel, I'm trying my best to find connections.

Nina described an example where she reached out to a member of the community to do a project with corn braiding and the community member rejected her request making her feel alienated from the community and setting a boundary between her and the local culture. She explained,

So, it's like, it's such a small community. And then due to everything that's happened to them, which is totally understandable. It's impossible to learn different things. So, wanting to do things and being capable of doing things, which I think would bring my art program into higher regards to a lot of people in that community. I'm just stuck. There's just nowhere to go. And that's been something that has really gotten to me, the fact that like, you know, … it's not only he didn't want me to be there. It was also like, you know, I would reach out to someone else, they'd be like, oh, if he said, no, then I'm not doing it either. I'm not making him mad at me. So, it was like, oh, how do I? How do I teach these kids?

Nina has tremendous respect for the community and their local culture. She envisions an art classroom where culture and art can come together in meaningful ways for her students. She wants to enlist the community in her students' art learning but finds it hard to do as an "outsider." She explained,

It is hard to get people in from the community. Yeah, that itself has been another, another, you know, Everest, trying to get people in the community to come in. But then when I, I have to actually get another person to do it for me because of who I am, right? They don't want to talk to me. So, it's like, I'm your art teacher in your community, would you like to come in and teach, you know, beading? Who are you? This is my name. I don't know that name. And then they'll just hang up.

Nina described having a conversation with her "specials" colleagues during their weekly planning meetings discussing how to connect to the community culture in their lessons. She explained,

I think all the specials teachers are non-native. I'm able to meet with the whole specials team every single week, during the planning period, and it's wonderful. And last year, I was really, you know, frustrated with that. I'm like, I want to learn how to do A, B, and C. And I remember another teacher being like, give it up, give up the dream. It's never gonna happen for you. I've been here for so many years. No one is going to help you. You are just trying to swim upriver for no reason. Just let it go. And it's like, I want to let it go. But I'm also like, well, what am I here for? For that, I really feel like this is such a different program, that it should be something that I'm doing, but maybe that's just my brain as well.

Student Art Opportunities Outside of School

Nina mentioned students participating in cultural learning and events in the community but did not know of any other art making opportunities that students participated outside of the community and AINS.

Challenges

Nina listed some of the challenges of being a singleton teacher at AINS. The demands of the job and "being the only one here" has been "stressful." Nina described getting numerous requests to display her students' artwork. She explained when people ask, "Can we have an art

thing going on? And being the only one here, it's really hard to just be like, ah, yeah, sure. I guess I'll just, you know, somehow, because you don't want to say no, because you need that engagement level to be heightened. Again, being the only teacher it, kind of all falls on your lap. She continued, "It feels busier because you have no(one), not only is it a little lonely, you get stressed out because you are the point of contact, and the only one that can do anything about it."

Another example Nina provided explained how different it was when she had an art colleague to share the burden with. She explained,

> So, he and I had to work a lot together, to share resources, to come up with new ideas, to do bulletin boards together, to do trainings together. We were very opposite people. Very opposite. And yet, you know, when we had field days at the school, you would never know because we were like a well-oiled machine working off each other, and it works really, really well. And sometimes I miss that just being like, hey, what do you think of this idea? Or, you know, I saw your kids doing this, what if I have the grade above you do this? And so, you know, that sort of thing was really nice to have. Do I miss it enough where I would go back? No.

Flexibility is another challenge when you are a singleton. Nina described the difference between her experience teaching in a city school to her experience at AINS. She stated,

> Yeah, when I was at the city school district, I didn't need to be flexible for anything. It was like, this is my schedule. This is what I have. This is what I do. Boom, done. And it was like, you know, school starts at 7:45am. I was there at 7:40am. And school ended at 3:10pm. And I was in my car at 3:15pm. Because everything was so structured there.

She described how she had to put in time after school and on her school breaks to prepare for her job demands at AINS. She explained, "I need to work on this over break now. I did a couple of trainings, and I did work on the literary journal with the librarian, because when else are we going to do it, we've gotta be flexible, you got to figure it out."

Nina described how different it is not having a partner to rely upon throughout the day. She stated,

> When I was at the City School District, and I was at one of my schools, it was me and another art teacher, we worked in a combo, we were in one room, we kind of like flip flopped, and you had that for like, ordering. And, you know, that little bit of support, you know, how curriculum-wise our game plan is going to be. And a lot of times, say if I was in a meeting and something ran over, he was there to be like, oh, let me just grab your kindergarteners real quick. And I'll take over for five minutes until you get back. Whereas now, say I go to a parent meeting, I'm the only one, so if I go over like one minute there's someone at my door. That gets, I shouldn't say hard, but it does have its own form of stress when it comes down to it.

Another challenge that Nina identified was related to the kind of respect and value her non-art colleagues have expressed towards art as a discipline at AINS. She explained,

> And so, you know, it's not that they're (art teachers) seen as "babysitters", but there's a lot of times where some of the stuff that I've heard and experienced you wouldn't do to just a regular ed teacher. Like at all that would not fly. And I don't know if it's, you know, the reason is because it's art or because I'm alone, and I don't think I have any ground to stand on, but I really, for example, back, right before holiday break in December, I had a class that went on a field trip. And they were supposed to have an art class during that time when they were on a field trip. And as soon as they got back from the field trip, the teacher just sent them down to my room. I had another class going on at that time. And she was like, well, they missed art so, they're gonna get art now. I'm like, but they can't I have a class. And she's like, well, you did have them scheduled for art today, so they're staying. So, I had to teach two classes, very different age groups, at the same time. Because it was just seen that way. And I really don't think that this teacher would have done this if it was, you know, a math program or an ELL program. So, you know, as much as being a singleton is hard. It's also that flexible range that you have to find because the value system for specials is so different. All the way across the board.

Nina provided another example of feeling disrespected and challenged by the perceived value of art learning. She added,

> I had a teacher approach me, and she goes, hey, we are going to throw a party in your room during such and such class, because their teacher is leaving, and I go, you're going to throw a party in my room? She goes, yeah, I mean, this class, what are they gonna miss out on, coloring? Hahaha. I go. Okay, I guess that's how you see art, that I just play with kids all day and not these skills of, you know, I'm teaching them how to cut with scissors, how to glue, how to talk to each other, how to fold paper. How to do all these things that they actually need to learn that are going to help them holistically. But again, I knew, so I just said sounds great…What am I gonna do rock the boat? And a lot of times it's just so interesting to me, because on your own, how do you stand up as an art teacher, a tech teacher, music teacher? How do you stand up to a group that says, oh, you're just playing and coloring?

Nina doesn't blame her colleagues for their lack of understanding of art learning but rather sees their perception as a common stereotype. She explained, "Well, I think if I were a singleton reading teacher, this would be a whole other thing. Being a singleton art teacher … luckily, I have a great principal. And I have a great community that regards the arts very highly. It's not that my coworkers or colleagues don't, but I just I feel like it's the natural progression of school, where specials aren't as, you know…"

Another challenge of being a singleton art teacher Nina identified is the number of times she is interrupted throughout the day by coworkers looking for art materials or art related favors. She explained, "…the amount of times I'm interrupted a day is, it's almost absurd because I'm the only one. I probably get interrupted, on average, five times a day at least. Do you have markers? Can I have some colored paper? Can you make this for me? You know those things, which I love to do, don't get me wrong. I really do. I love helping the community like our school community as a whole, but I could see that if it wasn't my personality being extremely flexible it would be too much for people."

Nina described the challenge of getting her colleagues' attention and their lack of time to create opportunities for collaboration. She explained,

> I am typically the one that reaches out. I'm not saying that art is not valued at AINS because it truly is. But everybody's busy. Everybody's got something going on. Everybody's got their own agenda. Everybody's got their own thing to do. So many times, I reach out. And I'm the person who was like, hey, I saw this, can we do this? Hey, I saw this, can we do this? All the fish prints that we were working on, I sent out an email a month ago. And I said, I would really love to get every adult on board. If you have five minutes to come down, you know, to make a print real quick, I'll show you exactly how to do it, I only had seven adults out of forty that were able to come down. And it's not that it isn't valued. I think it was more. So, everybody's just so busy all of the time.

Time is also a challenge when it comes to student learning and interventions. Nina described how often students are pulled from their art classes for interventions and other student services. She noted,

> I see a lot of middle schoolers get pulled during special times. So, I have a child right now. She has only been to art once, and it's almost March, because every art class, every week, she's pulled from art for assistance or something and then they want me to grade her. And I'm like, how do I grade a child that has done absolutely nothing because she's never here? And they're like, well, what do you want us to pull her from her math class? I'm go, okay, I get it, I see where your value system is. But like, can we somehow rotate things?

Despite having a content area PLC, Nina still feels somewhat isolated from her art content colleagues in the district. She explained that they do communicate but when it comes to curriculum and planning the conversations are "glazed over." She explained that each art teacher has a very different personality and "as a whole, we're probably extremely strong but again, it's that whole, you know, everybody's busy. Everybody's doing their own thing. We're all in our own little world. And that's part of it. I think we're all in our own little world. So how do you get out of your own little world and become a

collaborative group when on a day-to-day basis you're on your own?" She misses the bond between art teachers she has experienced in other districts. She explained,

> So when I worked in other districts, especially the city school district, there was a lot more of, there was a stronger bond between the art teachers, even if you only saw them once a year at the district, all city art show, there was, you know, we communicated and talked and stayed on top of each other's you know, work and stuff like that. Even though the district is massive. I think because everyone here is a singleton art teacher. That component of communication is kind of like feathered away or whispered away or whatever. And it's been difficult. Like, I feel like I'm the one pushing a lot to be like, hey, let's do something together. Hey, let's figure this out. Hey, you know, let's, let's try to do this together. And a lot of times, it's, you know, teachers going oh, okay. Because they haven't had to do it in a long time.

Another challenge, addressed earlier, is the difficulty of getting sub coverage to attend professional development training out of school. Nina noted that "I can't go do the trainings that I could have done before" in her previous positions. Even though many districts have experienced sub shortages when she was working at larger districts, such as in the city, she was told "there's always going to be a sub shortage, just go, someone will figure it out" when she requested to attend professional development trainings.

Skills for Success

Nina identified several skills she associates with being a successful singleton at AINS. First, she explained you need to be "extremely flexible." She notes that AINS is "so much more all hands-on-deck. So like, if I'm walking through the cafeteria to get to my room it wouldn't be unusual for someone to be like, hey, I gotta run to the bathroom. Can you watch my class? Sure, no problem. So, you have extremely flexible." Nina also described how flexibility and an open mindset come into play when approaching others to collaborate and develop an appreciation for art learning. She explained,

> When I went to do that Louise Nevelson project with another teacher. I said, here's all this information, I'll prep and plan for everything, please do this with me. Thank you, that sort of thing. So, not only being flexible, but also having that open mindset. You know, and wanting to jump in wherever is needed. And also, because I know that I'm not valued because I'm the art teacher. I also know how to take a step back, reading the room really well. And I feel like if you press too hard it is not gonna turn out very good for you. And then staying, and always learning and showing what you know.

Nina also stated that as a singleton art teacher at AINS "I truly love what I do. And if I could have all the kids every other day, I would love it even more. And I feel like until that value system, and that mindset is shifted. That's not happening." She continued, "You know, there's only so much people can do. I try to do as much as I can,

and not let it, not only make me sad, but also frustrate me and stress me out. Because there's no point, there's nothing I can do to change their value system and also make the schedule work. Unless I do things such as, hey, math teacher, can I teach a tessellation lesson with you? And then I kind of, almost sneakily, fit into their curriculum. So, you know, it's a huge flexibility component." She identified that communication is also a "key skill" and not being afraid to reach out to others.

Advocacy is a component of that communication. Nina described how she displays the students' work to communicate what students are learning in her art classroom and to remind people that she is there and teaching. She stated, "Most of my stuff goes straight up on the wall. I have three bulletin boards out front. And then I have one upstairs. And then I just line the halls. I feel like the more you put out, the more people are like, oh, yeah."

Advantages of a Small District

Nina, despite the challenges, is thrilled to be working at AINS. She stated, "I've literally never met such great children" and "I feel like a smaller community is much more supportive." She compared her experiences working at AINS and at another smaller school district to her experiences working in a large city school. She remarked, "my time at the city school district was just me flying under the radar. Because there's so many people, no one knows anyone. If you want anonymity, work for a giant district. Not saying there weren't pros to that too. There were, you know, seventy-five art teachers and you all got to do a show together and meet each other and do these things. But like, beyond that, it was just like, you know, this is much better."

Nina enjoys the opportunity to make connections with all her students. She explained, "I'm a rock star because I'm the only one. So, the kids, you know, it's so easy to make the connection with the students. I have groups that just come in because they want to just make, create, and being the point of contact, that's great." She described a family with multiple students in the district and how she had the opportunity to get to know all of them in her art classroom. She described the bond that was created between her, the children and their mother. She described,

> For example, there is a mom, I have four of her daughters. And oh, my goodness, they are just, every single one of them is just such an amazing child. They absolutely love art. One of her daughters is probably in my room for an hour every single day creating something. Another one of the daughters wants to stay after school every day and make art. And so, the mom and I have a great relationship. I've seen her at Target. And it's almost like seeing a friend in a way. Because our bond is close from her value system of the arts, and her children's enthusiasm for it.

Nina described the advantage of having your own materials and classroom space as "wonderful." And having autonomy in her program as "really nice." She explained,

"What I say kind of goes because there's nobody to argue that with me. So, if I'm like, we're going to do an art show, then we're going to do an art show, because I'm the only one that's doing it. So not having any barriers up in that aspect is really nice. It really is." She recalled the challenge of convincing a co-worker to accept her idea "You know, I remember when I was at one of my other schools, the other art teacher and I shared a room. I was like, oh, let's do this for our bulletin board. And he'd be like, I'm not gonna argue, but we're not doing that."

She described the successes of her collaborations and her appreciation for the opportunity to build relationships in a small school. She explained,

> I work a lot with the middle school science teacher. He and I have really
> good open communication with doing projects together. And he's great
> about that. And he wants to do more with that, that whole STEAM
> component. So, when he brought those (points to fish project) to me, he's
> like, are you interested? And I was like, Oh, yeah. And then it turned into
> this huge outside, you know, we're making videos and all sorts of stuff. So
> that is great to be able to just be like, oh, well, you know what, I want to
> do this instead? And there's nobody to be like, oh, you can't do that.

She described this autonomy and the creating of learning opportunities through collaboration as "magical." She stated, "molding and creating something on your own, as a singleton art teacher is, in its own way magical." She notes that autonomy comes with responsibility, but it is something she embraces. She stated, "And that's when I say things like, we're all in our own little bubble. It's so comfortable to just kind of like, hey, I'm here. I don't have to answer anybody, but me, really, when it comes to this. And that is, I have to say, that's a pro because it's, you know, when you answer to no one, but you also have no one to blame but you." Nina accepts this responsibility.

Nina described how she has never had this kind of opportunity to collaborate with other teachers before because of the large class sizes in the districts where she's taught. She explained, "I never ever had that opportunity in the city school district to correlate art with any other teacher because so many, so many kids. And that's why before when I said if I could send my kids to smaller districts then they're in I would have…there is a gigantic difference between having thirty-eight kids and eighteen kids; thirty-eight kids is survival, eighteen kids is creating bonds and more project-based learning and all sorts of processes and steps in-between that."

Nina embraces the "level of responsibility" that comes with working in a small district where "everything you do is seen." She explained, "So, you know, being in a small community, you are able to get to know people on different levels, get to know things. In a small community, everything you say, like everything you say, is heard, everything you do is seen." She continued, "I prefer where I am now than where I was there (city school). I kind of felt like I was flying under the radar. And it was just like survival; get through the day, do your thing. You know, if you can get it done, great. If you can't get it done, then whatever, no one really even cares.

Whereas here if I don't get something done, like if I didn't get that Literary Journal done... you know, the level of responsibility is different in a small community than it is in a large community."

Characteristics

Nina identified the following characteristics that go along with being a singleton teacher, motivation, control, autonomy, self-sufficiency, independence, empowering but lonely, flexibility, ability to communicate, visible, vulnerable, and being a life-long learner and independent researcher. Nina noted, "I don't know any teachers that aren't motivated, but you need to be pretty motivated" to be a singleton art teacher. Nina has embraced having to take control of her classroom and curriculum. She identified that if she did not have natural dispositions for being self-sufficient and independent, it might be a very different experience for her. She stated, "I feel like I'm in control a lot, which, that might be my personality trait, but it works really well here. And it works really well I think probably as a singleton teacher, if I had to rely on someone for things, it probably wouldn't work."

She feels empowered in her position at AINS and understands that with that she needs to be flexible and responsive to the school environment. She explained,

> It's, um, empowering, but lonely. You know, everything has a yin and a yang and a back and forth. So, it's empowering, but it's lonely. You need to be flexible, and also have strong communication. But those two kind-of, you know, go back and forth with each other. So, I think, as a singleton, you need to be, you know, out there and put yourself out there to increase that engagement. But you also need to be super flexible because you're the only one.

Nina described how in this small school environment there is an "all-hands-on-deck" mentality towards the day-to-day functions of the school and learning environment. Nina described how this can be "amazing and frustrating." As a new teacher in the building Nina is learning to navigate the "interruptions" and expectations. She explained, "You know, when you were there, you saw how many people were printing to my room. And that all-hands-on-deck is, it's amazing and it's frustrating at the same time. I like to feel that we're all connected. That's a value of mine. And I think it works best for our students here. But I don't think any boundaries have been really made. And again, this is only second year here."

Nina identified that she needs to be a life-long learner in order to navigate her evolving role as a singleton teacher at AINS. She has taken the initiative to learn more about the native culture and how to make herself "culturally aware" of the needs and values of the community that she now works in. She also noted that being a singleton can be lonely. She explained,

> So, I'm doing that NEA the micro credentials. Have you seen those, they have a whole set of them on Native Americans and being culturally aware, you know, all of that. And I just signed up for one because I'm like, I think my brain needs to do more to understand. And I wish that this was, you know, I'm always, I'll be

forever learning. I think anybody who's in education will be forever learning. And I'm hoping that the one I signed up for, which was Cultural Appropriation, is going to help me a little bit with understanding like, you know, and again, as a singleton art teacher, I found all of that on my own. And, you know, you're just kind of like floating out there on your little island just grabbing at anything that you can find,

Wants

When asked about her needs and wants, Nina identified that she needs help with processes and would like to have access to content specialists who could help her problem-solve equipment issues and build her knowledge base in areas outside her own expertise. She explained,

Um, I wish I had help with like, processes. Like for example, my kiln is broken. Apparently, it's been broken for eight years. And the previous teacher went to school for ceramics and clay. So, she knew how to bypass all this stuff on the kiln and still make it work. I have zero clue, the last kiln I had, I had to turn the knob every two hours and all of that, like it was old. So, I'm sitting here by myself going, how do I fix this? I don't know what to do. I don't know how to do these things. I ask the other teachers in the program, like, what do I do? And they're just kind of like, I don't know. I don't know where to go. And I actually have been reaching out to teachers in other districts for help. Because I don't know how to overcome that issue. That would be nice to have that sort of support.

Nina would like to participate in professional development training that is more content specific and relevant to the learning that takes place in an art classroom. She described instances of attending district training where the content was not relevant to her content area. She explained, "typically, if you go, like, I love these superintendent days, where they're like, here's how to integrate da, da, da, da. And you're just like, this has absolutely nothing to do with me. Yeah, so you do it because you have to."

Nina described her need for learning opportunities that are content focused where she can gain access to other content specialists. She stated, "But if I could just go, you know, if I can have a training at like, Clayscapes, or at the Delevan or something, those would be the trainings, where I'm learning things that actually really help me in the long run, because I can find trainings everywhere on management, and this and that, and I can talk to people, but when it comes down to art processes, when you're alone, I can't just talk to the teacher next door and be like, Hey, I don't know how to do jelly plates, do you know how?"

Nina identified that hands-on experiences would be particularly helpful. She explained, "Hands on learning. I want hands on learning. (laughs) I want to, like I said, go to the Delavan and learn from Molly, how do I do glassblowing. I want to go to Clayscapes, and learn how to make my own Raku kiln, I want to go to OCC and learn how to paint faces out of watercolor that children could do." She continued, "If the school were to tell me like, hey, we're going to teach you how to, you know, do something that's way out of my wheelhouse. We're going to teach you how to you know, laser engrave. I'd be like, yes, let's do this. Because I want to know as much as

I can know, because you're never… I love to paint. Do all my kids love to paint? No. So the more you learn, the more you're helping them." Nina recognizes that her growth as an educator, whether it be learning new processes and art content or learning about the values and traditions of her students' community, is vital to her ability to meets the needs of her students and her ability to grow her art program.

Respect for the Arts

Nina's story includes moments of frustration with the overall, societal, value for arts learning. Nina has had several art teaching experiences with different communities of learners and districts. She shared reflections of how she has perceived "value" for the art(s) discipline in the following statements.

I wish I was held up to the standards of a math teacher or a science teacher, but I'm not. And I think as a singleton teacher, it's never going to get there because people aren't going to…(pauses) how much of an extraordinary program are you going to make alone, meeting with like-minded people and things like that?

Wouldn't you think that, you know, my classroom is important? And it's like, you know, starting at that ground level, you know, how much do I want my community to see this is important, but I also want my co-workers and my colleagues to see me as important too. So how much can you really do on your own?

It does have its pros, it does have its cons like it does feel lonely, but it's also empowering. I think that one of the biggest issues with being a singleton art teacher and in arts in general is respect and having a valued system and wading through those waters.

I think that more so, I'm very lucky that I am here. And I'm very lucky that I'm in the community and the building and everything else that I'm in. But I think it fits my personality, too, with the flexibility and the constant on the go, wanting to do those things. I don't know if every personality would fit in this situation without losing it. And so that's, you know, I just I wish that as a singleton art teacher, we weren't seen as just being like babysitters and pushed to the side. Because, you know, I have kids that come in here. And they just want to lay on the ground and color. I have kids that come in here because they earned walk and the only place they want to go is the art room because it's comfortable and it's cozy. I have kids that are like, I want to do a science project. But I don't know how to make this. And then they come in here and we problem solve.

Summary

Nina stated,

I have a lot of passion for this. I have a lot. I can't imagine myself doing anything else. No matter how hard I've got it, I still wouldn't want to do anything else. I absolutely love this with like, every fiber of my being, you know, I love being not

only part of art, but I love being part of AINS and the Appleton District. I think if I didn't care, I wouldn't do it. I wouldn't have so much to say.

Nina's life history has helped her navigate transitioning into this new learning environment and embrace the challenges of being a singleton art teacher in a Native American community. She recognized that in her younger, novice years as an art teacher she would not have been as prepared for the challenges of being in an environment that requires you to be self-sufficient and confident enough to seek out help and training on your own. She explained, "I feel like if I weren't who I am now, I would struggle a lot more, because I don't mind going in finding a training, going to a training by myself hopping on and figuring something out, those sorts of like, puzzle pieces don't affect me, I don't mind them. But if you were to look at me, fifteen years ago, twenty years ago, I probably would have been like, oh, I'm not going to that big training all by myself. Experience can make you who you are."

Nina's personal experiences outside of the school environment and her active participation in the art community as a practicing artist contribute to her resiliency and determination to be a successful teacher at AIN school. She is a life-long learner and seeks out information and collaboration wherever she can to supplement her lessons and create engaging and culturally meaningful experiences for her students. Her teaching philosophy is student centered and focuses on providing students with the opportunity to have "voice" through their art creation.

Nina identified several characteristics associated with her singleton experience including motivation, control, autonomy, self-sufficiency, independence, empowering but lonely, flexibility, ability to communicate, visible, vulnerable, and being a life-long learner and independent researcher. She described instances of feeling both supported and unsupported by her colleagues, community, and administration. She described a school environment where the climate and expectation for teachers is "all-hands-on-deck." She shares examples of times when this environment was frustrating because she was pulled from her responsibilities as an art educator or repeatedly interrupted during instruction because boundaries and value for her art teaching/student learning are not yet established. She also described how close knit and caring this environment can be and provided examples of relationships she has built with students and parents. Ultimately, she expressed that she prefers the small school environment over her experiences in larger city schools because she values the relationships she can create in this environment and "being seen."

Nina described singleness as being lonely and empowering. She noted that autonomy comes with responsibility and a willingness to be accountable for your choices and actions. Although the district supports an art content PLC that meets every other week, Nina expressed a need for more communication and support with curriculum development, processes, and content learning. She identified a "want" for opportunities to gain support in these areas through focused, hands-on training in art content and technical support for issues such as kiln repair and maintenance.

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CURRICULUM VITAE

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OBJECTIVE: Dissertation Defense

QUALIFICATIONS AND RELEVANT EMPLOYMENT AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT EXPERIENCES:

EDUCATION
> Current - Ph.D. Student, School of Education, Teaching and Curriculum, Syracuse University
> 2014 - M.A., Adams State University, School of Education; Curriculum and Instruction
> 2007 - M.A., Syracuse University School of Education
> 1986 - B.S., Syracuse University S.I. Newhouse School of Public Communications,

CERTIFICATIONS
> 2013 - STEM Education Certificate with Leadership Distinction, NASA Endeavor Teaching Fellowship Program, Teachers College, Columbia University/Adams State College
> 2011 - Gifted and Talented Extension, Nazareth College
> 2007 - Certificate of University Teaching, Syracuse University Future Professoriate Program
> 2007 - Art Education

EMPLOYMENT

> 2018 - Present Senior High Art Teacher Tully Central School District
>> Course responsibilities: Studio Art, Advanced Art I, II, and Senior Survey, Photography I & II, Computer Illustration I & II
>> Extracurricular: Junior High Art Club Advisor, Digital Media Club Advisor, Positivity Project Committee, Technology Committee

> 2012 - 2017 Program Administrator and Instructor Tully Regional Enrichment Program (TREP)
>> In 2012 I received a five-year renewable grant to develop a Regional Enrichment Program to provide rigorous and diverse learning opportunities for children in the Tully and surrounding communities connecting learners, pre-service educators,

teaching professionals and experts *in the field* together in project-based community learning.

2016 - 2018   Graduate Teaching Assistant Syracuse University Department of Education Art
Education Assignments: EDU 660 – Tully Regional Enrichment Program, TREP Science and Arts Onsite Enrichment Program - *Interdisciplinary Arts in the Context of Community* and Curriculum Development for Dr. Week Elementary 4A Enrichment Program, Syracuse City Schools – Syracuse University Saturday Morning Art Workshops for Youth Advisor.

2013 – 2015   SUNY Oneonta Adjunct Instructor and Student Teaching Advisor
I have taught Methods in Elementary Science Course as part of a pilot program to develop a clinically rich model for project/place-based, interdisciplinary STEM teaching and learning. This program is supported by the TREP initiative for experiential community learning and in partnership with SUNY Oneonta, Tully Free Library, and Tully Elementary School. In addition, I have taught Social Studies and the Arts and Methods in Elementary Science in a pilot model for clinically rich teacher education at Milford School in partnership with SUNY Oneonta and Milford Central School District

2012 - 2015   SUNY Oneonta Student Teacher Candidate Supervisor

2012 - 2013   SUNY Oneonta Fulltime Faculty Lecturer – Department of Education and Reading
I taught Early Literacy, Methods in Elementary Science, and Issues in Education in a one-year faculty appointment.

2008 - 2012   Enrichment Specialist – Tully Elementary School
I provided Enrichment instruction and programming to students in grades K-7.

2007 - 2011   Art and Enrichment Teacher – Tully Elementary School
I provided art instruction for students from kindergarten to grade 6 and I developed
programming and taught Enrichment to students from grades K-6.

2001 - 2012   Art Instructor, Loretto
I taught a weekly watercolor painting class to the residents at The Nottingham Independent Living Community. My responsibilities were the preparation of materials and teaching of techniques in watercolor painting, drawing and design. I also taught creative arts classes at The Nottingham, R.H.C.F., Enriched Living Community. My responsibilities were to prepare and present creative arts projects to students with a variety of physical and mental skills and limitations.

2005 – 2007   Syracuse University's Future Professoriate Program
I was accepted into the Future Professoriate Program and earned a Certificate in University Teaching. This program provided extensive professional development opportunities for Graduate Teaching Assistants who were aspiring to pursue a future in collegiate education. In addition to my duties as a Graduate Teaching Assistant, I entered into a mentoring program where I worked with a college professor, Ludwig Stein, developed curriculum and was responsible for teaching college level Foundations Art Classes. I received my certificate upon submission and evaluation of my professional teaching portfolio.

2005 – 2007   Graduate Teaching Assistant in the Foundations Art History Department, Syracuse University's School of Visual and Performing Arts
My duties included teaching a weekly discussion class, preparing lessons, correcting papers and tests, and holding weekly office hours to provide one on one assistance for students. I assisted Professor Fowler in the History of Art and Design and History of Picasso, and Professor Meighan in The history of 20th – 21st Century Art and the History of Art and Politics.

2004 – 2005   Graduate Assistant in the Department of Art Education, Syracuse University's School of Education
I assisted Dr. Hope Irvine and performed various tasks in the art education department including working with pre-service education students. One such task was the organizing of an "printmaking' exhibition held at Huntington Hall, Syracuse University featuring work done by K-12 art students from area schools. Over thirty local schools were represented in the show.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT/ACHIEVEMENTS

2021 NAEA Research Commission Preconference Presenter
OCM BOCES Arts Leadership Network – Committee Member for Best Practices, Arts Advocacy and Essential Standards professional development initiatives for arts educators
Article Publication (2016): *Summer Science Snapshot: A Developing Partnership Model to Spark Interest in STEM Among Rural Learners* in Excelsior: Leadership in Teaching and Learning is published by the New York Association of Colleges for Teacher Education (NYACTE) Link:
https://xraise.classe.cornell.edu/perch/resources/excelsiorvol-10.pdf
NASA Endeavor STEM Teaching Certificate Program – Leadership Distinction
2012-17 Hoehl Foundation Grant Recipient, administrator of a five-year renewable award to support the TREP initiative.
NYS AGATE Board Member (2010 -2015)
Contributing author, *GEMS*, NYS AGATE Newsletter
Partner to SUNY Cortland and SUNY Oneonta in providing opportunity for clinically rich teacher professional development.
Article Reviewer *Global Education Review, Mercy College*
Article Reviewer *Journal of Research in Rural Education*
NASA Summer of Innovation Grant Recipient 2013
Target Grant Recipient 2011
Art$tart Grant Recipient 2010-11
NSF Space Lecturer Grant Recipient 2011
NASA Summer of Innovation Grant Recipient 2011
NASA NYS Space Grant Consortium Grant 2011
Regional Professional Development School Mini-Grants SUNY Cortland Team
(This program worked to connect SUNY Cortland teacher candidates with Tully students via videoconferencing and a sixth-grade class trip to SUNY Cortland)
2012 NYS Rural Schools Association Conference – Co-presenter
2012 NSTA Conference Louisville, Kentucky – Attendee
2012 Picture Perfect Literacy Workshop – Integrating Science and Literacy
2011 NYS AGATE Conference - Attendee

2011 NYS STANYS Conference - Co-presenter EIE
Photo-documentation/Digital Storytelling Rural Education Research Project with Dr.
Leanne Avery, SUNY Oneonta/Cornell 2010-11, 2011-12
Responsive Classroom Training 1 & 2
Digital Storytelling Workshop - Photostory3
2011 Space Science Conference Cornell
Comets and Asteroids Educator Conference 2011
NASA Space Science Teacher Fellow 2010
Summer Science Snapshot Program Cornell 2010, 2011, 2012, 2013
4H Citizen Science Symposium, 4H SET PWT and Cornell STEM Luncheon 2011
Bird Sleuthing Fellows Program – Bird Sleuth Education Ambassador
NASA/New York Space Science Grant Teacher Fellows Program
Mission US and WCNY Train-the-Trainer Workshop
Member of Monroe 2 BOCES Gifted and Talented Consortium 2011-12
Member NSTA
Member NAEA current
Cayuga Lake Floating Classroom Projects (2010-13)
Jumpstart for Elementary Art Teachers 2009
Visual Art Workshop 2009
Intergenerational Arts Lecture Series, Graduate Project 2007