

California State University, Northridge

Prioritization Practices in Central Office Administrative Decision-Making
for Standards-Based Elementary Arts Education: An Issue of Equity

A Dissertation in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Doctor of Education in Educational Leadership

By

Connie Covert

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The dissertation of Connie Covert is approved:

Dr. Jack Bagwell

Date

Dr. Nathan Durdella

Date

Dr. Ellen Edeburn, Chair

Date

California State University, Northridge

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Dedication

I would like to dedicate this dissertation to my mother and father, Wayne, and Billie, who supported me on this journey in the countless ways they will never know, and most importantly, on my journey in life. And to my daughters, Miranda and Olivia, I dedicate this dissertation in the name of persevering in what we dream to do and be. They remind me every single day of what is truly important in this world.

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Abstract

Prioritization Practices in Central Office Administrative Decision-Making for Standards-Based Elementary Arts Education: An Issue of Equity

By

Connie Covert

Doctor of Education in Educational Leadership

The purpose of this study was to explore factors affecting administrative prioritization practices in decision-making regarding the implementation of standards-based elementary arts education curriculum and instruction. The problem is there is inconsistent program implementation and inequitable access to elementary arts education curriculum and instruction, especially for racially and economically minoritized students in urban public elementary schools. The rationale for this study is that all students should have access to an education that develops cognition, improves literacy, and creates learner agency, such that a student can participate actively in their community.

Conducted in a grounded theory tradition, this qualitative study included interviews with seven central office administrators, a focus group of five arts education coordinators, observations of strategic planning meetings, and a document review that examined administrators' perceptions and practices when prioritizing decision-making in relation to elementary arts education. There is a gap in the research examining the experiences of administrators or arts education coordinators/designees in central offices of instruction, especially as it relates to decision-making for elementary arts education as evidenced by the lack

of published research. An integrative literature review generated a focus on three conceptual theories, Value Theory, Critical Race Theory, and Behavioral Descriptive Decision Theory, which formed the conceptual framework that guided the development of the research questions.

The central thematic domain revealed by this study contends with equitable access to elementary arts education. There were six, supportive key findings revealed by the data; 1) Arts education coordinators influence student access to elementary arts education; 2) Three of fifteen participants spoke of their existing elementary arts education programming using instructional terminology, explicitly when referring to the right to access or the quality of instruction; 3) Decision-making steps are guided by well-intentioned personal bias and only occasionally intentionally guided by state policy or standards, data, instructional practice, or student entitlement; 4) Most decision-making about elementary arts education is done by group consensus; 5) Central office administrators aim to create a dependable baseline of expected instruction; 6) All study participants claim they want to do what is best for students, but only three of fifteen explicitly spoke of equity in their decision-making.

It is hoped that the findings will provide an understanding of administrative practices that heretofore have limited and/or diminished elementary student access and offer insight into improved administrative behaviors.

Chapter I: Statement of the Problem

Human development describes a complex web of factors affecting the health and well-being of individuals across a lifespan. Together, these factors yield cognitive and behavioral outcomes that can shape the social and economic circumstances of individuals, their levels of creativity and productivity, and overall quality of life (National Endowment for the Arts (2011)).

For thousands of years, human beings have innately expressed their thoughts, feelings and perceptions of community and self through art. Indeed, the arts have driven or influenced our very development as human beings. With today's technological advances, for example, one need only scroll through posts and responses within the many social media platforms to see how people communicate what they think, feel, and believe through various art forms, a proliferation of which was seen during worldwide lockdowns during the COVID-19 pandemic. Train stations and public plazas world-wide often situated an outdoor piano, beckoning passersby to play, and upon their choosing, add to the ambiance of the daily commute of their citizenry should one stop to indulge. Likewise, some virtual communications demand slight notice as we, the audience, scroll past, while other expressions are finely constructed, profoundly thought-provoking, and compel us to pause, to deeply ponder the meaning that is conveyed by the creator. Meanwhile, access to elementary arts education in school, a practice that can elevate a young student's unique expression of their humanity, can be neglected, diminished in value, or completely absent.

Elementary arts education is quality instruction in one or more of the arts content areas (dance, music, theatre, visual, media art) taught at the elementary level, guided by core content standards, and assessed against rubrics of quality and equity. In a 12-year national study entitled

"Doing Well and Doing Good by Doing Art," Catterall (2010) describes long-term personal and academic benefits for all students who engage in quality, arts-rich experiences in school. Chappell and Cahmann-Taylor (2013) reveal how quality arts education develops social-emotional efficacy and the literacies necessary to compete in a 21st century global economy, in turn preparing students for greater success in the workforce. In fact, current research reveals 72% of employers think creativity is a singularly desirable quality in a potential employee (Americans for the Arts, 2015). Further, Hetland (2013) refers to the habits of mind shaped by ongoing, sequential instruction in the arts, such as perseverance, curiosity, problem-solving, and innovation as imperative for a 21st century global society and economy. Although some California schools have excellent art programs in place, with well-trained teachers, standards-aligned curricula, and high-quality facilities and materials, most do not. Instead, arts education in California is plagued by a lack of funding, underprepared elementary level teachers, and inadequate facilities. It suffers from uneven implementation and is often crowded out by other curricular demands. As a result, most students in California do not receive instruction at the level required under state policy

The California Department of Education (CDE) education code recognizes the arts as core content and an important part of a student's education beginning in early childhood (California Education Code, 2019). The CDE requires that instruction be offered to all students in grades one through twelve (see Table 1). Further, the *Visual and Performing Arts (VAPA) Framework for California Public Schools, Prekindergarten through Grade Twelve* (CDE, 2004) advises that high school credits of two, sequential semesters in one art form are necessary to ensure equity for all students, as this is a prerequisite for admissions into both the University of California and the California State University system (VAPA Framework, 2004).

Table 1

California Education Code Section 51210

Education Code Section 51210

(a) The adopted course of study for grades 1 to 6, inclusive, shall include instruction, beginning in grade 1 and continuing through grade 6, in the following areas of study ... (e) Visual and performing arts, including instruction in the subjects of dance, music, theatre, and visual arts, aimed at the development of aesthetic appreciation and the skills of creative expression.

California Department of Education 2020

Source: Taken from California Department of Education, Education Code, Section 51210, 2020

While there are no explicit directions as to arts implementation at the elementary level, the recently adopted California Arts Standards (CAS), which drew upon the National Core Arts Standards (NCAS) from the National Coalition of Core Arts Standards (NCCAS) 2014 for their construction, provide guidance and support for district and site-based administrative decision-makers and teachers to develop, implement, and assess arts education in elementary schools (CAS, 2020). In addition to these resources, there is much research to support central office administrators who include elementary arts education in their districts' strategic planning. Yet at the school-site level, Woodruff et al. (2014) reported that a lack of training in the arts affected teacher perceptions of arts in education in a negative manner and that "only two of the nineteen preservice teachers they studied had an art education credit" (p.108). When examining preservice perceptions of the arts in education, Lee and Cawthorn (2015) found that elementary preservice teachers value arts education, but mostly in relationship to other content in an integrated manner. Additionally, they found that preservice teachers recognized "systemic constraints" to their ability to address the arts, and so they indicated a need for advocacy for arts education for their students (p. 9). Administrators in the central office, who behave accountably for student

proficiency by creating, implementing, and assessing the success of instruction in all content areas and their applicable supports, need to be aware that their decision-making can be part of a larger system of inequity that directly impacts the elementary classroom if districts are to support elementary teachers implementing arts education curriculum and instruction.

Following a review of the report *Arts Education in Public Elementary and Secondary Schools 2009-2010* (Parsad, 2012), U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan said that areas of poverty were unlikely to provide arts education for all students, calling this “an equity issue and a civil rights issue” (Duncan, 2012, p. 26). This is significant because it becomes an issue of equity when students are provided unequal access to public resources that demonstrate the ability to improve students’ educational experience (Civil Rights Act of 1964, Pub. L. 88-352, 78 Stat. 241, 1964). Recent studies have explored the importance of arts learning as a social justice issue, recognizing that a student’s personal contributions during arts learning--a primary indicator of pedagogies of equity--are often addressed in an equitable classroom with such motivation.. Students' social imaginations are developed through arts education and Greene (2011) explains the critical role their personal experiences are brought to bear upon these learning experiences. Clearly, access to elementary arts education is important if all students are to be educated on an equitable footing, with schools purposely designing instruction to meet that need.

Such explicit pedagogical practices can create an environment conducive to equity-driven instruction with student personalization applied to content as a key practice. For example, Quigley and Hall (2014) speak of creating the “third space” (p. 3) to encourage home-school connection within science instruction. By extension, it can be understood that any content that is to be taught with equity, such as that encouraged in STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Math) instruction, can be taught within the third space: “Third space is a place where

students bring their home knowledge and discourses (first space) together with science knowledge and discourses (second space) to achieve educational equity while achieving access to the scientific discourse” (p. 3). Castek (2017) makes a “fundamental assertion--that the spaces humans create cannot be dissociated from human ways of being which are shaped by social interactions, human ideologies, cultures, systems, and structures of power” (p. 4).

Expanding our understanding and support of innovative instruction that values the sanctity of human learning is considered vital for emergent bilingual learners engaged in shaping their own linguistic and social identities, as well as other racially or economically minoritized students, and as such, requires the use of a critical framework of questioning and problem-solving if we are to engage in an authentic practice of equitable delivery of instruction. In 1994, educational pedagogist Gloria Ladson-Billings began looking at injustices in education through the lens of Critical Race Theory, most significantly at the impact of unequal student access to education for all students. Critical Race Theory has been defined as "a collection of activists and scholars interested in studying and transforming the relationship among race, racism, and power” (Delgado, 1997, pp.1711-1748) that is “an interdisciplinary approach that seeks to understand and combat race inequity in society (Ansell, 2008, p. 300). When looking at education and diversity in engineering, for instance, J. A. Mejia, Revelo, Villanueva and J. Mejia (2018) argue that it is necessary to examine issues through the lens of a critical framework if they are to “develop anti-deficit approaches to engineering education research” (Mejia et al., p.1). Likewise, when examining student-equitable student access to a quality, comprehensive education, Ladson-Billings (1998) suggests that the arts provide underserved students an opportunity to experience and influence the existing social construct around them, thus increasing their learner agency, an outcome that occurs when a student takes action to direct and own their learning, and as such, the

lack of arts learning is detrimental to minoritized students: “Limited access to arts in schools tends to have the greatest impact on minoritized youth, who tend to be hyper-segregated in schools with more limited budgets, less culturally and linguistically responsive practices, and highly controlled curriculum based on discrete skill development (Glandara, 2012; Ladson-Billings, 2009; Martinez-Wenzl et al., 2011.) Reflexively, it should be noted that the arts also provide otherwise privileged students an opportunity to uncouple themselves from their existing social construct of entitlement and develop empathy for those of a different background than their own (Michael, 2013).

Many challenges are presented to those creating a learning environment seeking to cultivate student identity and subsequent learner agency. Burch and Spillane (2005) argue that data-driven accountabilities impact policies and practices that explicitly recommend the delivery of well-rounded instruction, but Chappell and Cahmann–Taylor (2013) suggest that increased high-stakes assessment, and its resultant drive to generate student data in math and English language arts (ELA), has been detrimental to the consistent development of student identity and expression, especially for racially and economically minoritized students. In response to the demands and consequences of meeting these data-driven accountabilities, California’s administrators may ask why they need to consider elementary arts education content at all, especially when the development of student academic self-identity is of secondary priority to compulsory assessment of data-driven content, if acknowledged at all.

Problem Statement

The problem addressed by this study is there is inconsistent implementation and inequitable access to elementary arts education in California’s public elementary schools, not only for all students, but especially for racially and economically minoritized students

(*California Arts Education Data Project [CREATE CA]*, 2019). Existing research demonstrates a gap between the policies and accountability systems ensuring dependable elementary arts education programming and instruction (Landon & Russell, 2008). Kisida, B., Morrison, B., & Tuttle, Lynn. (2017) confirmed that “A persistent problem for arts education has been lack of research, and much of this has been due to a lack of data” (Kisida, et al., 2017).

But “In 2020, SRI Education Researchers conducted a comprehensive study of the status of arts education in California’s K-12 public schools...[reporting that] while much remains the same in 2020 as [reported in ‘An Unfinished Canvas’] in 2006...[and] some aspects of arts education [have] improved...[such as] higher percentages of elementary school students were participating in arts education...California schools still fall short of state goals for arts education (Woodworth & Benge, 2022, Pg.2).

Thus, administrators in California are challenged to implement a well-rounded education, and this challenge reveals inequitable access to arts education in elementary schools. Moreover, there is little to no statewide data detailing administrators’ decision-making practices at district levels regarding implementation even though it is the district’s responsibility to ensure it. Research reflects a gap between the policies and accountability systems ensuring dependable elementary arts education programming and instruction (Landon & Russell, 2008). Administrator rationale for limited or inconsistent inclusion of elementary arts education may be due, for example, to budgeting priorities or pedagogical questions not rooted in a standards-based lexicon and based on biased assumptions about elementary arts education curriculum and instruction. Additionally, the perceived demands of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2002 resulted in a narrowing of curriculum as administrators strove to meet its demands (Tester, 2006;

Robelen, 2011) leaving elementary arts education out of the instructional conversation. As Mishook (2006) laments, administrators secure the success of testing certain material at the expense of untested material, such as elementary arts education, especially when it comes to allocating funds and instructional minutes. As a consequence, there can be reduced opportunities for student access to arts education in our public schools. Rabkin and Redmond (2006) confirm that the arts are often "not at the table with subjects that [appear to] make more compelling claims for time and resources" (p.1). But, standards-based K12 arts education instruction is, like all other core content, instruction, and it is guided by a methodized set of national or state criteria that dictate what students should know and be able to do in any art form.

As education policy makers increasingly rely on empirical evidence to guide and justify decisions, advocates struggle to make the case for the preservation and restoration of K- 12 arts education. To date, there is a remarkable lack of large-scale experimental studies that investigate the educational impacts of the arts. One problem is that US school systems rarely collect and report basic data that researchers could use to assess students access and participation in arts educational programs (Kisida & Bowen, 2019, para. 10).

But standards based K12 arts education instruction is, like all other core content, instruction, and it is guided by a set of national or state criteria that dictate what students should know and be able to do. The Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015 (ESSA), codified in Title 20 of the *United States Code*, states that all students are to be provided with a well-rounded education that includes flexibility in innovative teaching strategies, and this can include standards-based elementary arts education (Title VIII, Section 8002). This tenet expands the possibilities for defining what is innovative, successful, or estimable instruction. Yet, the tenet also leaves it open

to administrators' decision-making to interpret what is innovative, successful, or estimable instruction, which can result in inconsistent implementation and inequitable access.

Purpose and Significance

The purpose of this qualitative study is to explore the factors affecting central office administrators' prioritization practices in decision-making regarding the implementation of standards-based elementary arts education curriculum and instruction in public elementary school. Central office administrators may include any administrator working in the central office of instruction making decisions on behalf of elementary instruction that includes, in part, arts education. Administrators' pre-existing personal/professional experiences shape their perceptions of curriculum and instruction, and consequently, their own methodologies and practices for decision-making. Ranking what is important in, for instance, available resources such as money, personnel, and instructional minutes, may be impacted by those personal experiences and perceptions. It would be revealing to become familiar with the nuances of those practices as they could provide insight into the potential pitfalls of decision-making that cause an unnecessary and preventable reduction, or outright elimination, of student access to elementary arts education. Unfortunately, it is not possible to find guidance on this as there is a gap in the research examining the experiences of administrators or arts education coordinators/designees in central offices of instruction. An arts education coordinator/designee is also instructional personnel working in the central office—their primary task is to coordinate arts education programming for a school district. A better understanding of administrators' prioritization practices in decision-making may help administrators proceed from a more informed perspective, thus remedying the inconsistent implementation and inequitable access to the arts for underserved students--and all other students--in public elementary schools.

Research Questions

The following guiding questions anchor this study:

- What factors affect central office administrators' prioritization practices in decision-making regarding the implementation of standards-based elementary arts education curriculum and instruction in urban- suburban elementary schools?
- What do arts education coordinators/designees perceive as their influence upon decision-making regarding elementary arts education in central offices of instruction?
- How do central office administrators and arts education coordinators/designees perceive the arts learning experiences of racially and economically minoritized elementary students?

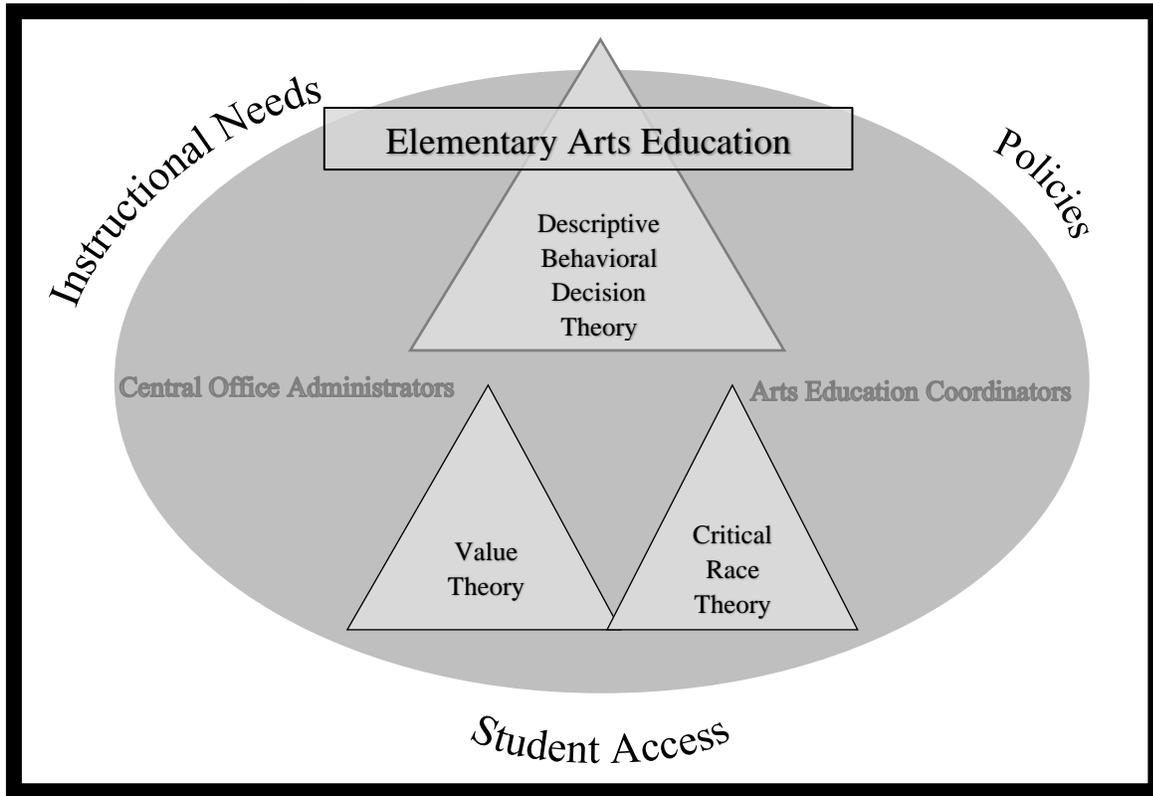
Theoretical and Conceptual Framework

Three specific theories provide a framework and context for this study: Value Theory, Critical Race Theory, and Descriptive Behavioral Decision Theory (see Figure 1). These theories help guide the examination of influences upon administrators when prioritizing for the implementation of elementary arts education curriculum and instruction. Implicit assumptions within the theories that compose the grounding framework provide a conceptual basis for the line of questioning within this research study. These questions attempt to limit the potential variables of concern within the phenomena of administrator behavior; the assumptions allow the researcher to ask why and how the observed phenomenon are the way that they are. The distinctive epistemologies of these theories shed light on previously unnoticed behaviors within the phenomena, allowing for a narrowing of focus during data collection and analysis. Basic descriptions of the phenomena have been gleaned from the data collected, enabling the

researcher to generalize about the phenomena and to filter interpretively through the theories to thematically group the data for analysis.

Figure 1

Theoretical and Conceptual Framework



Date created: 2022

While this study seeks to understand the many human influences upon decision-making, such as emotion or prior experience, its theoretical framework guides the analysis of participant data with the goal of narrowing the focus to those influences that are archetypal of decision-makers, and thus are recognizable, predictable, and adjustable.

Value Theory

Value Theory, in the sociological sense, is an approach as to how and to what degree we value people, ideas, places, and things. For thousands of years, philosophers and thinkers such as

Plato, Immanuel Kant, and John Dewey have grappled with the nature of valuing in an attempt to define what is good and bad. To understand if, how, and why administrators value elementary arts education in their decision-making, it helps to place the act of their valuing it into some ideological context if we are to subject it to such scrutiny. In 365 B.C.E., the Greek philosopher Plato hypothesized about establishing a standard for intrinsic valuing by determining whether or not there are absolutes in truth, beauty, beingness, or the goodness of things (Plato & Jowett, 1943). Plato asserted that to be able to properly value something at the highest level of its goodness one must possess knowledge of it; that if one has no knowledge of it, then it really does not do it service and, therefore, the valuing is useless.

You have been told that the idea of good is the highest knowledge and all of the things become useful and advantageous only by their use of this, without which any other knowledge or possession of any kind will profit us nothing. Do you think that the possession of all other things is of any value if we do not possess the good, or the knowledge of all of the things, if we have no knowledge of beauty and goodness?

A measure of [truth] which in any degree falls short of the whole truth is not fair measure, for nothing imperfect is the measure of anything, although persons are too apt to be contented and think that they need search no further (Plato & Jowett, 1943).

If we have no higher knowledge of these absolutes and think on them as only “matters of convention or opinion ... [then we turn them over] to ...the Gods ... [or the] hands of the most aggressive and most selfish elements in the community” (Chambers, 1936, p. 599). In the late 1700s, Immanuel Kant agreed that there could be an absolute moral value, rejecting the idea that valuing had to rely on comparison to other things to establish the value. In light of this, providing for regular access to standards-based elementary arts education is entirely plausible. But, while

elementary arts education is a standards-based instructional absolute value in and of itself, the challenge is that educators contradict that, seeming to relegate it to content that must be integrated with other content if it is to be perceived valuable, such as we see occur in STEAM (science, technology, engineering, arts, and math) instruction.

This presents a challenge to professionals in the field, for even John Dewey disagreed with the idea that there can be an absolute in anything, declaring in the 19th century that there cannot be an intrinsic valuing of something absolute. Dewey posited that there is no absolute; to value something, there must be criteria for valuing against that something, and so, therefore, there cannot possibly be intrinsic valuing. This presents a dichotomy to those who would seek to create and implement elementary arts education programming, for, to be able to integrate the arts with other content, one would still need to provide students access to initial core instruction in the arts.

Fortunately, arts education is malleable content, able to make connections to all other content. Schwartz (2012) speaks of people's valuing as having a checklist of criteria for comparison, existing within a context experienced by the person for the purposes of coping socially. In this regard, valuing becomes something of a personal possession to be defended.

Values influence action when they are relevant in context...and important to the actor...Values are beliefs linked inextricably to affect. People for whom [something] is an important value become aroused if [it] is threatened, despair when they are helpless to protect it, and are happy when they can enjoy it. (Schwartz, 2012, p. 3).

The aspect of Value Theory's epistemology recognized in this study focuses on the nature of an administrator's evaluation of elementary arts education for the purpose of decision-making. Like axiology, which studies the philosophy of valuing, Value Theory seeks to define

and classify things that are considered “good” (Schroeder, 2016, section 1.2), and why and how this leads to decision-making. While there are standards of quality for the arts, just as there are in all other content areas, in determining what “good” is in the arts, administrators still seem compelled to make decisions about it regardless of its established, intrinsic value as expressed through its standards or assess only relationally to its value compared with other competing concerns.

Good-First Theory vs. Value-First Theory

This study’s viewpoint on Value Theory is a moral-philosophical one, placing importance on understanding the complex attributes of “valuing” during decision-making and then connecting it to the prioritization process of elementary arts education curriculum within instruction. The context of valuing elementary arts education can pit the elements of decision-making against one another, creating a choice-making scenario such that administrators can then place arts content, come what may, within the curriculum. This is a challenge as administrators do not make decisions in an ideological bubble for elementary arts education only; they must take all aspects of a well-rounded education into account as they determine the level of implementation. This can set up an administrator to believe a false ideology about elementary arts education--that it must rely on other content matter to establish its instructional validity. To understand the impact of this decision-making protocol, it helps to be aware of the structure of conflict in one’s decision-making.

Mark Schroeder, professor of philosophy at University of Southern California (USC), is the founder and director of USC’S *Conceptual Foundations of Conflict Project*, an organization looking deeply into the philosophy of the nature of interpersonal conflict. According to Schroeder (2016), the good-first theory says that if something is good, then it is good for all and

so more of it must be better, whereas the value-first theory says that if something is indeed good, we value it based on value claims about it. A value claim is an evaluation or judgement of something leading to a claim about its value (Schroeder, 2016). If we look at elementary arts education through Schroeder's "good-first theory" and agree elementary arts education is "good simpliciter," meaning it is good overall, then do we simply assume that more of it is better? For something to be deemed good overall, we have to see it from multiple perspectives, and those perspectives will indicate value. For example, when parsing out limited funding, an administrator can judge elementary arts education is not, in comparison, good or "better than" other instructional content, and so they are free to unilaterally decide not to consider it (Schroeder, 2016, section 1.1.1).

Implicit in stating that an absolute value, such as elementary arts education, is "good" is that it can also be "bad" (Schroeder, 2016, section 1.1.2). This sets up a potentially false construct for valuing, as then the absolute is valued only in comparison to something else that is deemed similar in importance or state of being. When something is broadly evaluated against a similar thing, then that something can become "good" or "bad" in comparison as it is being evaluated, not for its own merits, but in its relation to something else. In this context, making decisions about elementary arts education curriculum and instruction becomes an either/or proposition in comparison to, say, math curriculum and instruction. This rhetoric would assume they are deemed similar and so may be interchangeable in decision-making, one for the other, and yet, they are not.

If administrators recognize federal policy stating that elementary arts education is core academic subject matter and consider it within a "value-first theory" mindset, then elementary arts education is acknowledged as valuable, and so it may be qualified by "value claims"

(Schroeder, 2016, section 1.1.4). The term “core academic subjects” means English, reading or language arts, mathematics, science, foreign languages, civics and government, economics, arts, history, and geography (Elementary & Secondary Education Act [known as No Child Left Behind] Title IX, Part A, Section 9101 (1)(D)(11), Definitions). By considering value claims about elementary arts education, administrators can come to understand the benefit it offers all students. Therefore, administrators will have the opportunity to make a reasoned decision about its place in curriculum and instruction rather than succumbing to the simplistic rhetorical fallacy that it is either good or bad in comparison to other content areas when, say, allocating funds or instructional time.

Critical Race Theory (CRT)

[Critical Race Theory is an] intellectual and social movement and loosely organized framework of legal analysis based on the premise that race is not a natural, biologically grounded feature of physically distinct subgroups of human beings but a socially constructed (culturally invented) category that is used to oppress and exploit people of color. (Britannica, T. Editors of Encyclopaedia, Britannica.com).

Educational Equity

The U.S. Supreme Court has affirmed that citizenship or immigration status of students, parents, or guardians cannot be used to bar students from public schools (Plyler v. Doe, 1982). [The Office of Civil Rights] OCR works to ensure that schools’ enrollment policies and practices are consistent with Title VI’s prohibition against discrimination based on race, color, or national origin. (U.S. Department of Education, 2014).

Equitable access to public education is often dependent upon the success of legal battles hard-won against issues of discrimination; battles that address the prejudice structurally inherent in the national, state, and local institutions defining the relationship between the United States of America and its citizenry. We know that policies for behavior are embedded in the structure of our institutions, and they are not all necessarily written with equity in mind. If access to a quality education is to be had, it is vital to ensure that policy is in place that addresses inequities if we are to meet the American entitlement of a free, public education for all. Evidence, or a lack thereof, indicates elementary arts education is inequitably provided to suburban schools in Southern California, and examining this through the lens of Critical Race Theory can help us develop strategies to address this educational inequity.

The Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015 (ESSA) legislates that all students should receive a well-rounded education and since the arts are defined as core and so are part of the well-rounded education, we must agree that elementary arts education is, as Schroeder (2016) might say, good simpliciter for all. Equity is a form of justice that concerns itself with “the bundle of resources that a person needs in order to lead a minimally decent life in their society,” also known as a “social minimum” (White, 2015, section on social-minimum). Educational Equity utilizes a Critical Race Theory framework to look at issues of inequity, exploring what resources and opportunities are needed to meet the social minimum for providing equitable access to a well-rounded education for all students.

While ESSA policy outlines much about what can be considered inclusive of “well-rounded,” it leaves specificity of strategy up to state and local educators for interpretation. It does, however, clearly continue policy established by NCLB by identifying the term “core academic subjects” to mean English, reading or language arts, mathematics, science, foreign

languages, civics and government, economics, arts, history and geography. In this regard one can assume a well-rounded education includes access to core academic subjects, which is the educational minimum to be expected for all students.

Since arts education is core academic subject matter within a well-rounded education and a part of the social minimum, then one must concur that all students should have equitable access. Arts education is part of an educational minimum in an equitable and just education. This presents a challenge for central office administrators, however, when parsing out instructional resources such as time, money, personnel, etc., as they are responsible for ensuring the entirety of a well-rounded education for all, not just for elementary arts education. The decision-making tree in this regard is complex, nuanced by the periodic alarm of data-driven decision-making and the sense of urgency to increase student achievement in ELA and math.

Descriptive Behavioral Decision Theory

Descriptive Behavioral Decision Theory describes the attributes of decision-making and provides this study a means to identify human behaviors that may be at play when evaluating and making choices about elementary arts education. Applying the logic of valuing education options with an eye towards equity makes sense, as long as central office administrators who implement ESSA policy take these things into consideration to imbue their decision-making practice rather than making decisions in isolation of evidence. Otherwise, if administrators do not provide for a well-rounded education for all students, they act based on a “legitimacy objection” (White, 2015, section on legitimacy objection). A legitimacy objection is when an administrator’s perception of a policy is that it is illegitimate or simply negligible. This allows for rendering the requirements of the policy unactionable.

In addition to looking at administrators' commitment to decisions in policy implementation, Descriptive Behavioral Decision Theory guides this study's examination of the attributes of the regular choices that administrators must make under a "subjective expected utility" (Chandler, 2017, introduction section). Subjective expected utility helps the study describe situations whereby administrators either do or do not understand the variables or risks at play in the choice that is to be made but rely perhaps on personal bias or group opinion.

This research sought to get answers to questions about administrator decision-making for elementary arts education and data collected from the literature review and the data collection tools yielded significant themes ripe for reflection. Utilizing the precepts of Value Theory, Critical Race Theory, and Descriptive Behavioral Decision Theory, the study built an overall conceptual framework of understanding around the problem and research questions. The conceptual framework that was created helped organize contemplative assessments of what is good for students and recognizes the injustice in not providing this good. The framework helps a reader come to learn that there is struggle and nuance in decision-making as administrators weigh instructional and policy considerations, pointing to the possibility that awareness of the value of elementary arts education and the issues of equity in access can impact administrative behaviors.

Overview of Methodology

Conducted in a grounded theory tradition, this qualitative study included interviews, a focus group, observations of strategic planning meetings, and document review that examined administrators' perceptions and practices when prioritizing decision-making in relation to elementary arts education. The use of a grounded theory methodology was appropriate because the research questions explored the many perceptions of administrators and arts education

coordinators/designees on decision-making from within offices of instruction. Participant responses served to guide further exploration as the researcher progressively learned more about the environment of decision-making in which administrators and arts education coordinators/designees operate. The primary sampling strategy of research sites and participants in this research study was criterion/networking sampling. The criterion for the participants ruled out persons in any district that are not accountable for elementary arts education programming within their districts. The sites for administrator interviews were determined by whether or not someone at the site was acting in the capacity of arts education administrator or designee. Further, interviewees must currently serve in an administrative capacity in a central or district office of instruction.

Limitations and Delimitations

Limitations

Limitations are factors that cannot be controlled by the researcher. While there is much research on the value of elementary arts education and policies to support it, there is little to no research detailing administrative decision-making regarding elementary arts education within the scope of a well-rounded education. The literature review explores the attributes of decision-making for education administrators, recognizing that the subtleties of decision-making about elementary arts education are not well-documented. The research methodology was designed to provide data about decision-making in this context, but it was anticipated that the findings might be limited by the depth of participant responses.

Additional limitations of this study occurred due to the restrictions placed upon school districts, schools, and researcher-participant interactions due to the coronavirus pandemic and the spread of Covid-19. These limitations included: the inability to conduct in-person interviews and

an in-person focus group; district unwillingness to participate in the research; data collection via synchronous internet web-based platforms such as Zoom; limited on-line access to document review materials; and inability of the researcher to observe on-line district strategic planning meetings.

Delimitations

Delimitations are factors that the researcher can control. While this study does reference the value of elementary arts education and why it is an issue of equity in the 21st century, it is not setting out to prove its value or importance nor to prove schools need elementary arts education; it explored the decision-making around that. Therefore, while a reader may feel compelled to search for more evidence about the meaning and importance of elementary arts education for all learners, that is not the focus. Rather, this study explores central office administrators' practices in decision-making and how these practices affect implementation and student access to elementary arts education.

This study is further delimited by the research site and participant selection. This includes a) specific selection of five southern California suburban school districts, each of which include elementary levels of instruction, and b) participant selection reflecting central office administrators who are responsible for the implementation of standards-based elementary arts education curriculum and instruction in an elementary setting.

Organization of the Dissertation

Chapter I of this dissertation introduces the problem, contextualizes its purpose and significance, and presents the research questions. Chapter I also familiarizes the reader with the core principles behind the conceptual framework that serves to guide the exploration of the research questions, embedding definitions of terms that may be unfamiliar to some readers

within the narrative. Additionally, limitations and delimitations of the study are proffered as explanation of any limits to the scope of the study (Volpe, 2019).

In Chapter II, this dissertation provides an integrated review of the literature aligned to the research questions. Analysis of the literature connects themes from three burgeoning theories that comprise the theoretical framework to examine administrator prioritization practices in decision-making regarding elementary arts education. This connection defines the parameters of a questioning protocol designed to explore and subsequently identify relevant topics to the research.

Chapter III outlines the research methodology, its guiding research tradition, the tools for conducting the research and analyzing the data and identifies strategies for cross checking the data for validity. Additionally, it provides necessary documents required for Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval.

In Chapter IV, data is analyzed using QSR International's NVIVO 12 qualitative data analysis software to code and aggregate the data into topics that will deliver content sufficient to create a descriptive narrative of the phenomena and results presented. As themes and trends are discovered, a concept map for the narrative was devised.

Lastly, Chapter V is a discussion of the study's findings. This includes summarizing relevant understandings, making recommendations to practitioners in the field, and suggesting topics for further research.

Chapter II: Review of the Literature

This is an integrative literature review, and as such the theoretical framework and narrative of the review are concurrently developed as the literature presents itself in relation to the problem and research questions. Three theories emerge from the literature review and guide the narrative that shapes the theoretical framework: a) Value Theory, b) Critical Race Theory, and c) Descriptive Behavioral Decision Theory. Torraco (2005) explains that an integrative literature review “reviews, critiques, and synthesizes representative literature on a topic in an integrated way such that new frameworks and perspectives in the topic are generated” (p. 356). This is a purposeful strategy as the study seeks to contribute new knowledge where there are gaps in the literature.

Gathering information for this literature review began by searching multiple resources on three broad topics: arts education, educational administrative decision-making, and equity. The searches were restricted to peer-reviewed journals, such as *Arts Education Policy Review*, *Harvard Educational Journal*, *Education Week*, and *American Education Journal*. The databases EBSCOhost, ProQuest, and ERIC were accessed. Written resources included the National Arts Standards, websites for professional arts affiliations, books, digital dissertations, educational leadership online newspapers, policy briefs, and scholarly treatises. Other materials were gathered from conference materials on the arts and research organizations, such as those generated by the Wallace Foundation and the Rand Corporation.

Thematic Development

Trends and patterns in the literature easily encouraged thematic development of topics, for analogy, much like harmonic development in a fugue by J. S. Bach is discovered by tracing the melodies throughout his piece. First, there was a search for trends in the literature to narrow

the focus. Then, available sources were imported into NVIVO 12 and segregated according to type: book, genre, journal article, reference, report, and webpage. A word frequency on topics was conducted in NVIVO 12 from the sources on topical terminology related to arts education and decision-making. The word frequency was narrowed to those terms containing the greatest number of references and words of a similar word stem. Queries were conducted on the terms, and, where there was commonality, preliminary codes were applied to the term-associated references. The references were grouped, thematic nodes assigned, and organized into cases identifying commonalities. The Thematic Classification Matrix (see Table 2 Sample Thematic Classification Matrix; see Full Version in Appendix A) that guides this literature review includes the author and title of the literature, the four major sections under exploration, and the themes resultant from coding all the literature. A checkmark in the column indicates the theme addressed in the literature.

Gap in Literature

There are many peer-reviewed articles on topics regarding arts education; for example, there is much developing about the value of teaching in the arts as discrete instruction or as a part of integration of content. “The question of access to arts education is one of the most common themes noted throughout the arts education literature” (Wan, Ludwig, & Boyle, 2018, pg. 8). But there is a gap in literature regarding the effects of administrative decision-making in offices of instruction leading to the implementation of elementary arts education curriculum and instruction in California’s public PK12 schools. Data from current research detailing topics on decision-making practices at the school and district level is limited, oftentimes addressing music at the school site level (Major, 2013). It relies mostly on research from data-driven decision-making that utilizes quantitative data on students, focusing primarily on ELA and math, gathered through

annual high-stakes testing. In this regard, research on integrating the arts across the curriculum is more prevalent when examining primary schools as opposed to secondary, where single-subject credentialed teachers and instruction is the norm.

Table 2

Sample Thematic Classification Matrix

| AUTHOR | POLICIES AND REFORMS | | | | VALUE THEORY | | | | EDUCATIONAL EQUITY | | | DECISION-MAKING THEORY | | | | | | | |
|--|---------------------------|-----------|---------------------------------------|-------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|-------------------------|------------------|--------------------|------------|--------|------------------------|----------------|-----------------|--------------------------|---------------------|-------------------------|-----------------------|---------------------------|
| | History of arts education | NCLB/ESSA | Impact of reduction in arts education | Arts as Core Curriculum | Devaluing of arts education | Benefits of arts ed for all | Benefits to Instruction | Social Emotional | Creativity | Innovation | Access | Entitlement | Accountability | Use of Evidence | Impact of Subject matter | Framing the Problem | Fear in Decision-making | Perceptions of Equity | Perceptions of leadership |
| Allina, B. (2018). The development of STEAM educational policy to promote student creativity and social empowerment. <i>Arts education policy review.</i> | | X | | | | | | X | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Burch, P., & Spillane, J. (2005). How Subjects Matter in District Office Practice: Instructionally Relevant Policy in Urban School District Redesign. | | | | | | | | | | | | | | X | | | | | |
| Castek, J., Schira Hagerman, M., Woodard, R. (2019). Principles for Equity-centered design of STEAM learning-through-making. 16. | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Catterall, J. (1999). Involvement in the Arts and Human Development. In E. B. Fiske (Ed.), <i>Champions of Change: The Impact of the Arts on Learning.</i> | | | | | | X | | X | | | | | | | | | | X | |

Date created: 2022

Use of qualitative data sources, such as perceptions of teachers and principals or indicators of a student’s educational experience, to explore planning for programming choices in elementary arts education registered few topics in the searches.

While it is true and helpful that there is quantitative data in California on access to instruction in selected arts content areas at the secondary level revealing gaps in instruction, there is little to no quantitative data as regards student access to elementary arts education or central office administrator decision-making. Furthermore, there is limited data regarding the use of arts content experts, such as arts education coordinator/designees, in decision-making, although there is some research focusing on the demands of school reform as it addresses the needs of a 21st century workforce.

There is implication in research indicating that it is qualitative data that should be guiding future decision-making as it includes epistemologies encompassing equity, global sustainability, and future-forward, or 21st century, instructional programming. In recent years there has been a growing body of research on elementary arts education as an issue of equity due to its impact on students' social-emotional welfare, a topic that can be served well by quantitative studies. While quantitative studies can point to the variable relating to access, qualitative studies can capture the subtleties of student experiences and make implications about the impact on student lives.

Part 1: Federal Policies and Arts Education

The purpose of the study is to explore factors effecting administrative prioritization practices in decision-making regarding the implementation of standards-based elementary arts education curriculum and instruction. The rationale is that all students should have access to an education that develops cognition, improves literacy, and creates learner agency, such that a student can participate actively in their community. A well-rounded education such as this will include elementary arts education as arts learning strategies provide students with the skills to communicate what they think, know, and believe through multiple means of expression. This literature review explores the value of arts education, the issues of equity surrounding access to

arts education curriculum and instruction, and the administrative practices in decision-making that impact access.

The Right to a Well-rounded Education

The term ‘well-rounded education’ means courses, activities, and programming in subjects such as English, reading or language arts, writing, science, technology, engineering, mathematics, foreign language, civics and government, economics, arts, history, geography, computer science, music, career and technical education, health, physical education, and any other subject, as determined by the state or local education agency with the purpose of providing all students access to and in enriched curriculum and educational experience (ESSA, 2015, title VIII, section 8002).

The value of sequential arts learning within a well-rounded education is justified by Catterall (2009) by identifying its benefits to students such as: a) increase in academic achievement; b) a greater statistical chance of going to college; and c) positive change in societal behavior, such as includes philanthropy and community engagement. Acknowledging the positive impact sequential arts learning has within a well-rounded education therefore implies that all students have an inherent right to such an education under federal and state education code. For example, according to Rebell (2012), NCLB of 2002 “established a statutory right to comprehensive educational opportunity through its stated goals of ‘providing fair, equal and substantial’ (NCLB, 2002) educational opportunities for all children” (p. 47). Additionally, Klein (2016) states that the subsequent reauthorization, known as the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) of 2015, provides flexibility for schools and districts to utilize innovative instruction to support every student’s statutory right to a comprehensive education. ESSA’s (2015) definition

of a well-rounded education is one that includes the arts as core content along with humanities, sciences, social sciences, English, and math, implying that a comprehensive education includes the arts as a right. Klein (2016) explains that ESSA was an about-face from NCLB requirements meant to remove the presence of big government in education and the high stakes testing that proliferated under NCLB. ESSA policy guidelines are crucial for districts developing elementary arts education programming as they provide for more flexibility in innovative instructional choices. This assumes learning across all domains of academic core content, including elementary arts education. Moreover, ESSA aims to ensure all students will learn the skills needed to be productive participants in a 21st century global society, also known to some as college and career readiness.

According to ESSA, education administrators have permission and responsibility to provide a well-rounded education for all students. Klein (2016) writes that ESSA has provided flexibility in curriculum and instruction so that states can take action to innovate, implement, and assess educational programming. The California Teachers Association (CTA) has established that, to do this, administrators should be aware of the expectations of policies, guidelines, and Common Core State Standards (CCSS) curriculum frameworks at local, state, and national levels regarding provision for elementary arts education (Landon & Russell, 2008). Yet research conducted by the Education Commission of States (ECS) (2005) reveals varying administrative practices in decision-making leverage competing priorities against each other, often shunting arts instruction to the bottom of the prioritization list (ECS, 2005, as cited in Major, 2013). Moreover, research demonstrates inequitable access to standards-based arts education has negatively impacted all students, but especially underserved students as it places them at an educational disadvantage as compared with that of students with greater arts education access

(Catterall, 2009). With ample policy and research evidence supporting arts education in our nation's public schools, disparate implementation has prompted researchers to explore the value of the arts in instruction, and, with this knowledge, in recent years have begun deeply examining arts education for all students as an issue of equity in schools.

The Arts as Core and Declining Access

There seems to be limited research, however, regarding decision-makers in central offices of instruction and the challenge they face when trying to deliver elementary arts education curriculum and instruction to their entire student populations. In 2008, the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) reported “a steady decline in funding for arts education between 1967-1984” (Allina, 2018, p.80). Allina (2018) cites “three influential publications” that examined this decline: *Coming to Our Senses: The Significance of the Arts for American Education* (American Council for the Arts in Education [ACAE], 1977); *Can We Rescue the Arts for America's Children?: Coming to Our Senses 10 Years Later* (Americans for the Arts, 1988); and *Toward Civilization: A Report on Arts Education* (National Endowment for the Arts [NEA], 1988) (p. 80). These reports determined that there was no possibility for all students to receive a comprehensive education including the arts, motivating the National Endowment for the Arts to begin engaging with the federal government on behalf of arts education. This resulted in the arts being identified as core subject matter and was reflected in the language for the congressional federal policy, Goals 2000: Educate America Act. In fact, since the passage of Goals 2000, “the probability of high schools requiring arts courses for graduation requirements increased significantly as a result of Goals 2000, and, concomitantly, the number of arts credits required by those schools also increased significantly” (Elpus, 2013, p. 20). Status as core academic subject matter has followed suit in all subsequent policies to date.

The Center on Education Policy reported that, due to NCLB, time allocated for English language arts (ELA) and math increased by 46%, which by estimate reduced access to arts education by 57 minutes a week (McMurrer, et al., 2008; as cited in Allina, 2018). Chappell et al. (2013) summarize many years of school reform under NCLB by saying that “the landscape of reform emphasize[d] accountability and test score gains” resulting in reduced funding for content not considered core content (p. 3). Grey (2010) contends that since the arts were not tested under NCLB, the funding is susceptible to redirection to other content needs. It does not matter that the arts have been designated academic core content since 2000; it is rather how the arts are judged in relationship to the entire educational landscape that determines their place in instruction. Chappell et al. (2013) determine that “this [complicated] reform movement has created a bleak picture for the arts in education,” if not a bleak picture for students who were “dropping out at alarming rates” (p. 3).

Part 2: Thematic and Theoretical Context

Value of Arts Education for All

Understanding the value of elementary arts education in instruction is vital to an administrator when deciding about its place in the curriculum. Value theory can serve as a guide for examining how elementary arts education is impactful and why and how educators value arts education in instruction. Value theory allows for constructing the parameters of examination based upon what the people involved find worthy of examining. In this case, Value Theory looks at student access to elementary arts instruction, the academic and social-emotional impact of the instruction upon students, the potential it provides for equity driven classrooms, and the challenges in decision-making administrators face when planning for elementary arts education.

Value to Academic Success

Fortunately, there is a growing body of research identifying the value of arts education. Of interest is that some research directly relates to its impact, or lack thereof, on standardized test scores, a topic upon which most administrators focus. Rabkin and Redmond (2006) report that programs with instruction integrating the arts were “associated with academic gains across the curriculum as reflected in standardized test scores” (p.61). Catterall (2009) continues this idea, stating that data indicates sequential learning in arts education over time improves the educational experience of all students, in some cases, improving test scores, thus increasing a student’s chances of going to college. “High school students who earned few or no arts credits were five times more likely not to have graduated than students who earned many arts credits” (Catterall et al., 2012, p.14). The Arts Education Partnership (AEP) Working Group (2010) concurred, reporting that students with access to regular quality arts learning had a more positive outlook on school exhibited by better attendance and grades and a greater likelihood of going to college (AEP Working Group, 2010). In their 2019 study conducted with the Houston Arts Access Initiative, Kisida & Bowen asserted:

when we restrict our analysis to elementary schools, which comprised 86% of the sample and were the primary target of the program, we also find that increases in arts learning positively and a significantly affect students’ school engagement, college aspirations, and their inclinations to draw upon works of art as a means for empathizing with others (para. 9).

However, Winner (2019) conversely discusses that it is possible that sequential access to arts instruction does not directly increase test scores but simply reveals high achievers. In fact, results from Winner’s studies are not conclusive of the impact of arts instruction upon test scores. But Catterall (2009) argues that students of color and those of lower socio-economic status with

inequitable access to standards-based arts education are underserved in comparison to other students with greater access and this can ultimately limit their options for attending college. This, in turn, can impact a student's employability and earning power.

Value to Future Employment through Creativity and Innovation

Employers express that creativity is a desirable skill for employees. Thusly, it can be assumed that lacking the skills to develop creativity puts some students at a disadvantage (Chappell & Cahnmann-Taylor, 2013). The value of a 21st century classroom should not be underestimated as it acts as an authentic lab, of sorts, teaching and encouraging the practice of skills necessary to thrive in such a workforce. Schoen & Fusarelli (2008) state that "creativity is widely accepted as the precursor to innovation" (p.194). Sousa (2011) argues that learning in and through the arts impacts a student's cognitive growth, developing the competencies necessary for a 21st century workforce.

Arts education aids students in skills needed in the workplace: flexibility, the ability to solve problems and communicate, the ability to learn new skills, to be creative and innovative, and to strive for excellence.

– Joseph Calahan, Director of Corporate Communications, speech, Xerox Corporation (2015).

Much like the pedagogies used in science instruction, learning in and through the arts is based on inquiry, curiosity, impression, and is often project- and/or problem-based. A classroom utilizing arts education skills, techniques, and teachings acts as an ersatz learning lab seeking to recreate an authentic experience for the purpose of learning, resultant in some type of student product. It gives the student a visceral experience that replicates real-world situations through

personal exploration and experience (Chappell & Cahnmann-Taylor, 2013). This creativity cultivates an environment for innovation much like that which is experienced in the workplace.

Valuing Self-identity in Learning Promotes Innovation

Developing students' expression of self, politics, and understanding of issues of justice may perhaps be arts education's greatest value (Winner, 2019). Fiske (1999) says that "learning in the arts can not only impact how young people learn to think, but also how they feel and behave" (p. 8). Moreover, research suggests that a young person's self-identify is closely aligned to their perception of their cognitive abilities (Reilly, 1992. as cited by Fiske, 1999). Possessing confidence in self-identity, in turn, reduces fear when taking risks while participating in creative or innovative learning experiences where problem-solving is concerned.

Connecting learning with one's emotion is a powerful strategy of equity that can ensure knowledge is imprinted. This approach is especially valuable as minoritized students are encouraged to enter STEAM fields (I. Nava, personal communication, July 31, 2019). Students cultivate a personal identity in STEAM education as their learner agency is developed. There is much value in promoting an environment ripe for innovation. Students learn to "manage risk" as they have space and permission to fail; taking risks enables students to "intensify the quality of their interactions and products" (Heath, 1992 as cited by Fiske, 1999, p. 27). This push and pull during cognitive struggle and successful release of an idea or an expression is partly what develops a student's perseverance and enables feelings of freedom to think, analyze, and create. Being confident when engaging in adaptable, critical thought supports the development of that perseverance, and ultimately prepares a student for the demands of 21st century employment (Hunter et al., 2018). Hunter et al. (2018) harken to Gardner (2008) when they refer to arts education's unique and generative tension between discipline and creativity.

[The arts] recogniz[e] and valu[e] critical thinking differently [for] “the arts reach beyond reason...appeal to, deepen, or even repel our senses, for in this risky environment of curiosity, self-reflection, and solution seeking is our need to create; and it is this environment from which innovation is born” (Hunter et al., 2018, p. 51).

When a student has comfort within their self-identity to allow themselves the freedom to create, it is more likely that they are able to innovate.

“The arts are not just a nice thing to have or to do if there’s free time or if one can afford it. Rather, paintings and poetry, music and fashion, design and dialogue, they all define who we are as people and provide an account of our history for the next generation.”

--Michelle Obama (2009).

Value of the Social Emotional Impact

Central office administrators may be more inclined to pay attention to the extrinsic value of elementary arts education as it is easier to point to quantitative data on student achievement even when it is difficult to see the correlation of instruction to immediate student proficiency gains. But it may be that recognizing its intrinsic value is that which is most impressive.

Chappell et al. (2013) list the many ways in which advocates attempt to engage decision-makers in understanding the extrinsic value of arts education to the curriculum. They elucidate the potential for improved student test scores, connections between standards in multiple content areas for the purposes of making new meaning, and show how, in some cases, arts learning adds to the “disciplinary knowledge” (p. 4) of other content areas. But Catterall (2009) found specific evidence of a correlation in other areas over a student’s life, as did Harvard University’s Project Zero study (2017). Catterall reports that access to sequential arts instruction captured data that

reflected much social-emotional benefit from arts learning--a benefit that has direct influence on a student's academic achievement. Chappell et al. (2013) see this, however, as a "defensive posture" on the part of despairing arts advocates as it does not drive straight to the "heart of learning...that asks: Why do people create, question, desire, interact, and make meaning in the world?" Instead, advocates don't want us to think about what "the arts *do*," rather they want us to think about the "unique tools that the arts *offer*" (Chappell et al., p. 5). Winner (2019) agrees that connections are made when correlating content but argues that it is the habits of mind or "dispositions of thinking' that are engaged when making art that produce the greatest and most lasting impact on a learner (Winner, 2019, section the Studio Thinking Framework).

When we begin to examine the intrinsic value of the arts in elementary education, we begin to see the nuances in learning that the arts provide. According to Davis (2008), the arts "make and provide meaning through aesthetic symbols" (p. 40), a crucial pedagogical attribute that must be present in any classroom seeking to maintain a standard in cultural relevancy and respect for equity for all students. Chappell et al. (2013) summarize the work of Greene (2000), stating that "the arts and social imagination are intertwined...shifting the conversation from apology and justification to validation ... [that the arts aesthetic purpose is] "transformative and emancipatory" (Chappell et al., p. 374). It is very important for minoritized students and those of lower socio-economic means to learn in classrooms where their experiences acquiring and building knowledge are complex, of quality, diverse in pedagogy, and personal.

Learning in and through the arts provides obvious extrinsic benefits for students that can impact their education in meaningful ways. But it may be, perhaps, the intrinsic social-emotional benefits of arts education that more powerfully motivate learning and as such deserve more recognition and attention during the administrative prioritization and decision-making process.

Certainly, if we are to develop innovative instructional environments where equity is paramount, arts education strategies must be a vital partner in our schools' pedagogical handbag.

Critical Race Theory and Equity in Access to Elementary Arts Education

This study's literature review explores the context and influence of arts education on all students, but especially racially and economically minoritized students through the lens of Critical Race Theory (CRT); and the impact that administrator decision-making has upon student access. This review extends as well to considering "gendered and racialized messages about how intelligence, creativity, and academic aptitude [are] demonstrated in school" (Grogon & Dias, 2015, pp. 123-145).

Students' Rights to Access Instruction

Given the value of the arts in education and the recommendation that schools provide a well-rounded education, it becomes an issue of equity when all students do not have access to elementary arts education within their education. Chappell et al. (2013) report that since 1980 "youth engagement in the arts has dropped" (p. 3). Rabkin and Hedbergtell (2011) tell us that the decline for white children is negligible, while in contrast, "only 26% of African American youth and 28% of Hispanic youth report participating in the arts in schools as compared with 58% of white youth" (p. 3). This is of concern because students of color or lower-socio-economic means are potentially deprived of other life opportunities when lacking access to arts education (Catterall, 1999). "The nation's poorest students, the ones who could benefit the most from arts education, are receiving the least" (Cohen, 2015). Ladson-Billings (1998), asserts that all students have a right to a comprehensive education providing skills that give students a stronger place and voice in their community. Studies demonstrate that "on average, arts-engaged low-income students tend to perform more like higher-income students in the many types of

comparisons that the studies track” (Allina, 2018, p. 80) and as such are at a disadvantage when they do not have access.

High Stakes Testing, Perceptions of Equity and Elementary Arts Education

Success on high-stakes tests can open many doors for students, gaining them access to select coursework, raising their status within the student body and providing them entrance to electives, clubs, or coveted relationships with the most sought-after teachers, but most importantly, college and career readiness. Likewise, failure can alter a student’s social groups, restrict student access to coursework such as arts education electives, and perhaps alter even more than a student’s academic standing; it may also change their sense of self identity. To the point, these high stakes tests and their subsequent student data come at a price. Barriers to educational opportunities can occur when students do not meet standards and thus the curriculum is narrowed in response. Ladson-Billings (2006) refers to the “education debt” (p. 5) that must be paid back if we are ever to close the opportunity gap and improve student achievement.

Elementary Arts Education and Equitable Instructional Pedagogy

A classroom with elementary arts education can create a context for learning that can help children understand diversity (Paris, 2012). In fact, the elementary grades are an optimal time for pedagogies of equity and the introduction of diversity and all its concepts. “For multicultural education to be effective, it must be introduced in the early years and reinforced throughout the school years” (Berthelsen & Karuppiyah, 2011, p. 38). In such a classroom, students are able to “create and communicate their own cultures” and realize others’ cultures and differences as they are “imprinted on different art forms” (Davis, 2008, p. 22). When building an instructional environment focused on equity, “the arts can become a tool for minoritized school reform [and instruction] that centers its processes in human dilemmas and agency and that speaks

from the perspectives of those communities most affected by policies and cultures of oppression” (Chappell & Cahnmann-Taylor, 2013, p. 248). Baquedano et al. (2013) speak about the many strategies that teachers can employ to modify learning environments to become classrooms of equity. Conversely, an elementary classroom rooted in concepts of equity as expressed through the arts can assist non-marginalized students in seeing other points of view and help them become aware of their participation in the organizational and institutional structures of oppression that run through their communities.

Arts education opens many possibilities for students to express their prior knowledge, what they think, and believe, and not just by demonstrating what they have learned against a set of standards. Horsford et al. (2011) says that culturally relevant instruction is the way we think, that recognizes the value of a student’s personal capital, and this adjusts what and how teachers teach. Arts learning can be culturally relevant learning as teachers create an instructional space where students bring their pre-existing knowledge and experience, and human expression, to the table. It creates a type of setting that is a safe and equitable environment, as a student’s unique contributions are valuable, if not essential, to what is being learned. Gay (2010) and Ladson-Billings (2009) tell us that being culturally and linguistically responsive is necessary for minoritized students and this is present in a classroom utilizing arts education pedagogies. Gay (2010) and Ladson-Billings (2009) provide testament that the differing art forms have the ability to inspire, thus enlightening, for example, a student’s formal writing. The beauty and challenge of personally inspired student-written product is that, while it may be measured against rubrics designed from the arts or any other set of standards, it is unpredictable as it is original unto the student. Educators must recognize non-traditional, untested student work product and behaviors

not as abnormalities from a specific norm but as their voice “expressing a plurality of world views” (Ullucci & Battey, 2011, p. 6).

Equity and Self Identity in Science Technology, Engineering, Arts and Math (STEAM)

In 2006, Sir Ken Robinson gave a TED (Technology, Entertainment and Design) Talk where he asserted that “creativity, now, is as important in education as literacy and we should treat it with the same status” (Robinson, TEDx Talks, 2:46, 2006), especially considering the impact technology has had upon learning and graduation rates. There is now public interest, if not need, for creativity and technology in education as it opens up the possibility for all students to go to school and eventually come to work in fields that have heretofore been off-limits to some population groups. Clearly, elementary arts education that occurs within a STEAM education fits this description, as it is a STEM initiative with the elements of art and design bringing all learning together into a form of application. In reference to reparations for persons of color due to systematized racism in America, Beason (2019) quotes Vennie Deas Moore, an historical researcher from Georgetown, who states, “I don’t want money... What I want the government to do is educate our children so they can be engineers and builders — like their great-great-great-granddaddies were” (p. 66). A STEAM education increases a student’s overall academic achievement, and it can be an ideal learning environment as its “focus on arts integration [provides students] with the tools and ideas to reach and engage all learners” (Duma, 2014, p. 12).

When the foci of design, critical problem-solving, and creation reflects learners’ lived experiences and interests, it is more likely for learners to feel empowered as designers and makers of things that matter to them and their communities, thereby shifting the culture of learning-through-making to be more expansive and

responsive to inequities that learners experience in their daily lives (Castek, 2019, p. 1).

The implementation of elementary arts education in a classroom can help create an environment of equity as the student's sense of self is promoted through their own learning. More specifically, the implementation of a standards-based, elementary arts education within a STEAM environment, however, can be inextricably intertwined with a student's self-identity, relationship with their community and culture, and can promote the growth of a student's informed self-expression.

Decision-Making

It is clear there is much to be gained by providing students a comprehensive education rooted in equity, flush with personalized experiences. Central office administrators prioritize such learning and make decisions about the allocation of resources, such as funding, time, personnel, and instructional curriculum and material on a daily basis. Given the value of elementary arts education in a well-rounded education, administrators who lead with equity would do well to recognize and include elementary arts education in their deliberations.

Administrator Cognitive Ability, Knowledge, and Mental Rules

Decision-making is the primary function of an administrator and yet they are likely to suffer lapses in judgement for many reasons (Mayes, 2014). In his seminal work, *The Administrative Behavior* (1947), Herbert Simon challenges the mid-20th century scientific assumption that if decision-makers have boundless cognitive ability, they ought to be able to make a rational decision. His life-long efforts published in more works thereafter assert that human beings are imperfect in their ability to analyze a surfeit of data and conclude with a perfect decision. But Cristofaro (2017) summarizes Simon (1947), saying Simon extends this

concept in his later studies, by “redefining human rationalism” as a “bounded rationality” (p. 6). More simply put, Simon posits that administrators will, most often than not, make a decision that is a “good solution” (Simon, 2001, p. 33) as opposed to making one that is preferred. Cristofaro (2017) says Simon opened the door to other researchers of decision-making in management who acknowledge “the hidden rules that govern our mind” (p. 171) when deliberating on a decision. Cristofaro (2017) refers to Simon’s (2001) coining of the term “satisficing” which means settling for decisions that are not the best but that will satisfy in some way or another. Cristofaro (2017) refers to Simon, saying “incompleteness of information; difficulty in the anticipation of the consequences of future actions; and scarce knowledge of all possible human behaviors [are] cognitive challenges to rational decision-making” (p. 172).

Since Simon’s first efforts on rationality in decision-making, there have been multiple methodologies created to assist researchers in looking at instructional choice making, but ultimately, they all indicate that decision-makers “use many rules and strategies en-route to a decision” (Slovic et al., 1977, p. 8). Herein lies a challenge for administrators; one can generate a descriptive model for strategic decision-making in offices of instruction, but it will not necessarily be useful as an iterative process for all content areas, such as elementary arts education, as content decisions do not all have the same needs. Additionally, all schools do not have the same needs. In examining how central office decisions impact schools, Mette and Riegel (2017) ask practitioners to “consider how the support from the central office to building principals is shaped by one’s definition of instructional leadership” (p. 47). And yet, despite ample policy expectation, administrators in California are routinely challenged to decide in favor of implementing sequential elementary arts education for all students (Landon & Russell, 2008). In the ever-changing climate, as in ongoing school reform, a central office administration

committed to making purposeful and informed decisions on curriculum and instruction, including elementary arts education, is as much a necessity as is having a strong policy to guide and support it.

Strategic Decision-Making

Strategic decision-making is the process of aligning short term goals with the long-term goals of an organization's mission and vision. Eisenhardt and Zbaracki (1992) argue that "a strategic decision is one which is important in terms of the actions taken, the resources committed, or the precedents set" (p. 2). While there are many protocols available for administrators to use in decision-making, there is really no standard as "strategic decisions are highly complex and involve a host of dynamic variables" (Harrison, 1996, p. 2). Coburn et al. (2009) emphasize that offices of instruction are complex organizations whose decision-making practices require interpretation of information, argumentation between colleagues, and persuasion of those colleagues to agree to a certain position. Calabretta et al. (2017) suggest that first an administrative team create a frame of understanding about planning that recognizes the tension between one's intuition and one's rationality as this can assist in navigating the existing context such that innovative thought can occur. Much like those espoused in Simon's (2001) work, it is important to note that the practices highlighted by Coburn et al. (2009) are behaviorist in nature, rather than organizational or political, emphasizing that the attributes of decision-making are "shaped in crucial ways by preexisting working knowledge and practices that guide how people come to understand the nature of problems and possible avenues for solutions" (Coburn et al., 2009, p. 1116). In fact, "it requires a great deal of knowledge on the part of decision-makers about substantive matters that are the target of decision-making" (p. 1146). This is crucial for when administrators from the office of instruction are influencing the decision-making of school

site administrators, arts education coordinators/designees can be looked to as knowledgeable resources (Honig & Coburn, 2008).

Subject Matter *Matters*: Contextualizing Subject Matter in Decision-making

The framing of a strategic decision and all its variables is incomplete without the administrator factoring in knowledge about the nature of the content, its policy requirements, and programmatic or student need. So, it is not just that offices of instruction are complex in structure and organization that influences decision-making, but that the administrators who inhabit decision-making roles not only need some prior knowledge but need to be fluent in the subject matter. To gain the knowledge and conscience to be informed decision-makers, administrators must take the time and steps to gather information from “various evidence sources” (Honig & Coburn, 2008, p. 608). Kowalski (2008) says “decision based on informed choice is both a disposition and a skill, which ultimately achieves more effective results” (p. 3). This means that decision-makers can improve their practice by gaining basic literacy through familiarizing themselves about the subject matter.

Unfortunately, Burch and Spillane (2005) share that very little research reveals that “subject matter acts as an important context for broad-scale...instructional reform” (p. 54). Indeed, they remark that little research has been conducted on the importance of subject matter as the primary context for decision-making by non-school based administration, and this lack of context plays into the “enormous role in how district accountability policies” impact school sites (Burch & Spillane, 2005, p. 56). It seems that the specific “working knowledge” Coburn et al. (2009) find so vital for integrity in decision-making may not be factoring into deliberative conversation and this influences decision outcomes (p. 1120).

Omission of subject matter knowledge in administrative practice can have significant consequences. As a nation of educators, administrators grapple with the ramifications of data and accountability during the national school reform movement motivated by NCLB, especially now that ESSA allows for flexibility and administrator judgement. Corcoran et al. (2001) refer to administrators experiencing difficulty as they navigate this high-stakes environment, likening it to an administrative literacy, of sorts. Major (2013) states administrators have overlooked purposeful consideration of social studies or the arts to focus mostly on two tested subject areas that mattered most to them, to the near exclusion of all others--ELA and math. This means that other subject matter is routinely ignored in decision-making.

ESSA indicates provision of a well-rounded education for all students (Zubrzycki, 2016), but years of engrained school reform efforts habituated the devaluing of other content areas in the curriculum and may still guide decision-making under the same mental models of exclusion. Prioritization of more resources and instructional time for ELA and math instruction at the expense of other instructional initiatives are now embedded in the structural makeup of district budgeting practices (Major, 2013). ESSA's much-celebrated flexible language allowing for innovation in instruction is a guiding recommendation that can remediate this; however, it is not a mandate, and draws no mention of formally ensuring repair to previously ignored content (Saults et al., 2019). Some argue that adjusting to the flexibilities allowed through ESSA need to be seen in reference and opposition to the unintended restrictive decision-making practices generated by NCLB. As accountability policies dramatically influence the implementation practices of leaders, current research tells us we must recognize that the "subject matter differences reflected within these practices" continue to shape the context for any decision-making (Burch & Spillane, 2005, p. 56). This would imply caution for administrators who desire

engaging in exemplary instructional decision-making as opposed to decision-making that merely satisfies, as those exclusionary habits may still appear to be acceptable variables. “We need new approaches to accountability that will genuinely improve learning of the skills we actually value, rather than simplistically focusing on those traditionally tested throughout the 20th century”

(Schoen & Fusarelli, 2008, p. 195).

Development of Fear in Decision-making

To understand the importance of ESSA’s language and intent on flexibility in instructional choice, one must understand the consequences of NCLB upon untested curriculum. Crum et al. (2009) speak at length about the student data that high stakes testing feeds administrators to help guide their decision-making in school reform practices. The reasoning behind high-stakes testing was and still is to monitor equity in access to a quality education for all students. The new language in ESSA is meant to counterbalance the ill effects of poorly-implemented NCLB requirements. Under NCLB, requirements were interpreted as a mandate to formally and regularly monitor student achievement, track students into targeted coursework and interventions, and penalized schools if there was no increase in achievement (Crum et al., 2009). This resulted in environments of fear in educational decision-making, as educators were loath to embrace any subject that wasn’t tested (Shuler, 2012). “Fear of the sanctions that come from failing to achieve” (Kowalski & Lasley, 2009, p. 40) caused administrators to narrow their focus to measure and improve student achievement as represented by test scores. “These pressures have disproportionately affected access to the arts in a negative way for students from historically underserved communities (Kisida & Bowen, 2019, Para. 3). Ironically, the result of high-stakes testing driving school reform is the inhibition of school reform itself. “High-stakes

environments create[d] a single-minded focus on avoiding all sanctions, accompanied by a fear to try anything new” (Schoen & Fusarelli, 2008, p. 192).

But according to Park and Datnow (2009), “part of using data effectively require developing a process where data [and decision-making] are discussed openly without fears of repercussions” (p. 484). Other education reforms have been pushing for curricular innovation in schools, such as science, technology, engineering, arts and math (STEAM), Career Technical Education (CTE), and K12 arts education, all of which require creative instructional pedagogies and non-standardized curriculum models. Schoen and Fusarelli (2008) point out that a “paradoxical dynamic...exists between fear and innovation...in non-educational contexts... [and that] fear not only inhibits creative thought, but also causes dishonesty and competition” (p. 194). Schoen and Fusarelli (2008) go on to say that fear is not particularly inspiring for innovation, for when in fear, educators are unwilling to stray from the “tried and true.” In fact, Hagel and Brown (2002) assert that high-stakes testing does not just breed fear, but it creates an obvious “high-threat work environment...not favorable to risk-taking” (Hagel & Brown, 2002; cited by Schoen & Fusarelli, 2008, p. 194). A learning environment that is free from fear of mistakes and their consequences is something that is vital to STEAM, CTE, and K12 Arts Education pedagogies and curricular structures. Even more devastating is that these types of learnings are exactly what minoritized and students of low socio-economic means need to remain competitive when entering the workforce. Schoen and Fusarelli (2008) tell us that “creativity, widely accepted as the precursor to innovation, flourishes in loosely structured environments characterized by high challenge and low threat” (p. 194).

Fear can be a trickle-down proposition when fearful decision-making from the central office is interpreted by the school site. A decision can impact how teachers and students behave

in the classroom in response to that decision. But highly qualified, credentialed teachers in the arts navigate the waters of fear-based student learning by utilizing the many various arts strategies and habits of mind to encourage students to take a chance on thinking something new (Winner, 2019).

Upper-level administrators are demanding schools take the risk to build and sustain a 21st century educational environment with appropriate equipment, curriculum, and pedagogy that gives an equitable chance to students, but “they are expected to be, simultaneously, compliant and exploratory and to be risk-takers in a risk-averse environment” (Hunter et al., 2018, p.100). This demonstrates a lack of knowledge, or at the very least, a lack of sensitivity, on the part of decision-makers to make nuanced decisions about the importance and place of non-tested subject matter, such as elementary arts education. Administrators want innovation in the classroom but may not be willing to surrender the resources of time and money to accomplish it if they are unsure of the outcome. For example, two years following the passage of Goals 2000, which recognized arts education as core subject matter, over 44 states had adopted standards in the arts (Elpus, 2013). And yet, purposeful inclusion of elementary arts education in schools’ curriculum and instruction is still disparate. In other words, if the arts are not tested, fear of the consequences may inhibit teachers and administrators so they will not push for it, even though the arts are considered valuable as core curriculum (Hunter et al., 2018).

Administrator Values and Omission Bias

Omitting content for a variety of reasons, such as a lack of understanding of the subject matter and its policies or personal bias, is a problem. Overlooking core content, either intentional or unintentional, results in consequences as if one had purposefully considered those elements of

the content and then decided not to implement the curriculum. This is omission bias and adversative to accepting responsibility for providing a well-rounded education for all.

While decision-making by omission bias has several causes, taking the default position of doing nothing is a cause that may seem to be the easiest. Baron and Ritov (2009) state that omission bias is often aligned to the status quo. If all things are the way they are in the moment, then it may seem reasonable to fall to a default position reflective of the status quo and continue omitting elementary arts education. An administrator unsure of the causality of a potential decision on elementary arts education, or unsure of the options, may likely fear the blame of a potential negative result from the decision. If an administrator can claim lack of knowledge (regarding elementary arts education), they may also assume they are not responsible for their decision, or lack thereof, since they can say they knew nothing about it. According to Baron and Ritov (2009), when thinking about causality in prioritizing decision-making, it is a sort of “self-deception” (p.164) for an administrator who knows all the options to think the arts will take care of themselves and need no central office decision. Moreover, Baron and Ritov (2009) further argue that a person’s emotional state can impact their bias of omission as the emotion alters their perception of the attributes of the decision they need to make.

Deciding whether to implement curriculum is often based on factors other than a given content area’s policy requirements, the implementation needs of its programming, or its value to a student’s education. In fact, Burch and Spillane (2005) posit that when “districts mediate instructional practice, most of the research to date tends to be subject-neutral” (p. 1). Current researchers not only speculate on the impact of administrators’ personal beliefs and biases in decision-making for arts instruction, but they also reveal how destructive the consequences may be when these attributes are treated as appropriate inputs to deliberation (Hunter et al., 2018). In

other words, beliefs may be held as lifelong dogmas or even be learned generationally such that an administrator does not know how they developed their perspective. This does not bode well for informed decision-making in a high-stakes environment such as that during ongoing school reform.

Appropriate inclusion of the arts in curriculum may be impacted by the many personal values carried by administrators, rather than policy, evidence, or data (Hunter et al., 2018). Major (2013) asserts that NCLB'S requirements made it easy for administrators to justify prioritizing decisions by dismissing subject matter they didn't understand, in effect interpreting the law from a personal point of view rather than an instructional one. Furthermore, Major (2013) says the variability of personal biases between decision-makers can make it difficult to engage in common conversation. But when there are "shared understandings...[it] enable[s] district leaders to move quickly from evidence to attribution without discussion" (Coburn et al., 2009, p. 1128). Shared understandings can be very valuable, serving to provide a foundation for creative conversation that can transcend the need for topical discussion at the lowest level of understanding and promote higher-level, curricular innovation. Colburn et al. (2009) further demonstrate that participatory processes, such as meetings and consulting with colleagues, foster development of common frames of reference or ways of viewing issues that guide how groups interpret evidence and incorporate it (or deliberately decide not to incorporate it) into their decisions (Coburn et al., p. 1124).

But when the knowledge base of administrators in common dialogue is limited, or perspectives are personally biased, the common frame for dialogue is weak and cannot support decision-making that leads to a preferred outcome rather than one that merely satisfies (Cristoforo, 2017). This is crucial as Burch and Spillane (2005) discovered that administrators

considering subject matter concerns “not only enact[ed] but transform[ed] subject matter norms... [often times] generate[ing] new practices based on their views” (p. 70). In the case of elementary arts education, the acclimatized lack of informed dialogue and imposition of administrator personal viewpoint has resulted in a slanted perspective on the importance of arts learning, altered pedagogical norms of the content and its delivery, and consequently decreased student access. Burch and Spillane (2005) state that this ability to shape how subject matter is perceived, whether it is accurate or not, means we need to “[attend] to the beliefs and attitudes that subject area leaders have about policy beneficiaries or [other] targets” (p. 73) if we are to have knowledgeable dialogue when making decisions.

Use of Evidence to Inform and Guide Decision-making

Seeking evidence to inform a decision is a primary strategy for administrators to gain knowledge on a given topic. It is one of the primary motivators for laying the foundation for instigating dialogue and ultimately engendering other decision-makers to come to consensus. While research demonstrates school-sites are now accustomed to using evidence for decision-making, “the sheer scope of contemporary policy demands on central office administrators has received far less attention” (Honig, 2008, p. 579). Acquisition of “insight appears to be a process which involves the juxtaposition of competing alternatives or problems leading to a quantum shift in gestalt” (Eisenhardt, 1992, p. 33) and ought to be a regular part of an administrator’s self-discipline. But variations in how administrators interpret opposing positions or evidence, such as student data, can alter the framing of conversation around a decision (Coburn et al., 2009). If evidence begets the problem frame, it is important the evidence is accurate, complete, and well-researched. One cannot assume that when evidence is provided that it is of integrity to the topic; this is challenging as low to mid-level administrative decision-makers often accept what upper-

level leaders provide to them as evidence. Coburn et al. (2009) found that supportive evidence “rarely addressed the assumptions about high-quality instruction or how children learned” (p. 1138), effectively excluding content considerations. To compound matters, lead administrators often ferret out evidence that suits the situation administrators want, bolstering the appearance of its validity (Corcoran et al., 2001). In fact, according to Coburn et al. (2009), districts have been known to hire consultants to conduct research and produce findings from carefully curated evidence to provide reasoning for a given decision to implement within an initiative. Moreover, Coburn et al. (2009) examined how decision-makers shape the construct of their understanding in a decision-making process, stating that “they can and do interpret the nature of problems and appropriate solutions in contrasting ways” (p. 1144). Additionally, Coburn et al. (2009) identified factors that shape decision-making processes, including content knowledge among district administrators, organizational structure, resource constraints, and leadership transition (p. 1116). These processes can be adjusted to affect decision-making culture in offices of instruction. Such practices, when facing ideological conflict, can force lead administrators into using political rather than instructionally motivated measures to “build a guiding coalition” (Kotter, 1996, p. 9) of the loyal who are willing to go along with the leading voice in a given reformation. Therefore, the dialogical structure for decision-making then circumvents an authentic discussion on the subject matter.

Changes in Leadership to Ease Decision-making

Coburn et al. (2009) confirmed that “when district decision-makers [address] conflicting solution frames...they [narrow] participation” (p. 1136). Simply put, if someone dissents or otherwise conflicts with the lead administrator or the general consensus of the group during decision-making, they are somehow removed from the decision-making process rather than the

group making the effort to grapple with the information they are providing. This is antithetical to the idea that gathering evidence is essential to building knowledge prior to decision-making. Honig et al. (2008) advise that “higher levels of collaboration in districts [results] in greater access to evidence;” [that to] “increase sense-making,” [offices of instruction should] “fund individual central office administrators to specialize in searching for evidence” (p. 597) and provide this to the decision-making group.

This is not the norm, however, and Coburn et al. (2009) found that upper-level leadership may go so far as to exchange those persons in decision-making authority with other administrators who hold the upper-level leadership’s position on the issue to ensure the conversation goes a certain way. Coburn et al. (2009) cite a case in which a new superintendent brought “alternative frames for problem solving, differing potential solutions than those posed before her” (p. 29) and used new people to implement her decision-making agenda. This type of practice effectively shuts out those who may have valuable knowledge on the topic such as content experts or administrators with institutional experience. Additionally, Coburn et al. (2009) determined that “pre-existing worldviews” (p. 1127) influenced administrators’ framework prior to decision-making. Corcoran et al. (2001) found that the reasons administrators with knowledge were removed from the decision-making were wide-ranging, and that many times those persons had been very successful in the initiatives they were managing. Their competency was not the issue. Corcoran et al. (2001) discovered that in all the cases they studied, the reason someone was pushed out was because they had somehow “offended significant interest groups or political leaders” (p. 7).

Use of Content Specialists as a Resource in Offices of Instruction

One might think that funds recouped by reducing personnel in offices of instruction is best served by being redistributed to the subject matter needs of those subjects measured by high-stakes tests. Again, this harkens to the paradox that strategies utilized to reform schools are often strategies with consequences that actually inhibit change. “These efforts sorely underestimate the importance of central office leadership to help build school capacity for improvement” (Honig et al., 2010, p. 12). In their study, Burch et al. (2005) found that when districts did have content experts in subject matter, those interviewed stated that they had never been asked about their work before by researchers, even though numerous studies had been performed at their districts. Ironically, these content experts bore responsibility for enacting the change needed for the reform, and yet they were routinely excluded from the decision-making dialogue in lieu of others with no or incomplete knowledge and a singular focus on ELA and math.

We interpreted this as a reflection of policy researchers’ inattention to the importance of subject matter in policy design and reform enactment. While content area directors figured prominently in the implementation of district instructional reforms, district offices abound with other kinds of staff who exercise important leadership for reading and mathematics reform (Burch & Spillane, 2005, p. 22).

In all fairness, the “difficulties in assembling persuasive and timely evidence prevent[s] it from being the central focus in debates on what, to, and where to invest” (Corcoran et al., 2001, p. 10). There is not enough time in the day to be all things to everybody, no matter how honest and true one’s intentions might be.

With so many decisions to be made on a daily basis, administrators in offices of instruction may not have the time to hear all voices on a given topic and sort through all the variables influencing the decision that needs to be made. Resource constraints make it difficult to use evidence in substantive ways because district personnel have less time to search for new or novel solutions and less time to engage with evidence and each other in ways that encourage and enable them to rethink their assumptions and develop shared understandings (Coburn et al., 2009, p. 30).

Arts Content Administrators/Specialists/Experts

Utilizing arts content experts in offices of instruction can support informed decision-making. While content specialists are meant to deal with reform and programming, there are other district administrators who have oversight on district actions that impact implementation as well, such as fiscal managers or technology directors (Burch & Spillane, 2005). Such non-instructional central office administrators also have their own experience and opinions about program implementation and will act accordingly. They may not have the necessary understanding of subject matter needs or constraints and their decisions may obstruct implementation, resulting in reduced student access.

For example, the procurement division may not know the district's approved vendor for visual arts supplies sells supplies that are sub-standard to those required for Advanced Placement visual arts classes. A content specialist has specific content knowledge and training and would be able to work with the arts department, fiscal services, and the procurement division to create a system for providing supplies that are more appropriate. After all, access to a quality and well-rounded education requires appropriate supplies for all students and is recommended under

ESSA. Boards of education are held accountable for providing appropriate supplies to students. In 2000, the court case *Eliezer Williams, et al. vs. State of California* established that the state would annually conduct an audit (Williams Sufficiency audit) on the availability of basic educational supplies in schools at a decile of 1-3. The purpose is to monitor that all students have access to the same, appropriate materials. But the Williams Sufficiency audit does not provide guidance to districts on all materials and supplies necessary for all content areas, including elementary arts education for which there are limited state-adopted textbooks. For instructional materials that have not gone through the adoption process, like necessary consumables in visual art and science, the state allows for utilizing materials that are aligned to the content standards. A content specialist can bring evidence and knowledge to the decision-making table when choosing which materials are aligned, bridging the gap between district functions and instructional programming to ensure equity and fidelity of implementation.

While constraints of time, money, personnel, and policy recommendations are common challenges in providing elementary arts education, they are not insurmountable to the point of exclusion of the content. “Educational leaders must move beyond the fear of being judged in the court of public opinion to do that which is known to be effective, despite skeptics” (Schoen & Fusarelli, 2008, p. 195). Central office administrators must possess knowledge about elementary arts education and the pedagogical fluency necessary to participate in quality instructional dialogue that leads to the most preferred model for prioritizing decisions on implementation, especially in times of school reform and accountability. When performed collaboratively, with authentic knowledge and/or evidence, decision-making that allows for these challenges can be well-informed and conclude with a more equitable result.

Summary

This study seeks to understand how the prioritization practices of decision-making influence central office administrators regarding the implementation and access to elementary arts education curriculum and instruction. This researcher's exploration of the body of literature in and around elementary arts education found a nonexamination of central office administrators' decision-making habits and procedures. There was also indication of limited research measuring the accountabilities for instruction and its direct correlation to the impact upon equity in access for students. Additionally, at the time of this writing, there was no explicit examination of the impact of arts education coordinators upon equity. To examine these gaps, this literature review was divided into a thematic construct aligned to the theoretical framework including value, educational equity, and decision-making theories. Moreover, this literature review provided an in-depth exploration of the benefits of arts education, equity in access to elementary arts education, federal policies, and variances in adult decision-making (i.e., strategic decision-making). This study expands the research by providing a better understanding of administrators' prioritization practices in decision-making. The findings from this study may assist administrators to proceed from a more informed perspective, thus remedying the inconsistent implementation and disparate access to standards-based arts education in public elementary schools.

Chapter III: Methodology

The purpose of this qualitative study is to investigate administrative prioritization practices in decision-making of central office administrators and arts education coordinators/designees who are responsible for the implementation of a standards-based arts education in elementary schools. This is significant because it is an issue of equity that all students receive access to elementary arts education. Research demonstrates that quality arts education develops social-emotional efficacy and the literacies necessary to be competitive in a 21st century global economy (Chappell & Cahmann-Taylor, 2013), all essential qualities for being college and career ready. And yet, there is inconsistent implementation and disparate access to elementary arts education in California's public elementary schools (Education Commission of the States, 2020).

Existing research reveals that California's educational leaders are aware of local, state, and national policies recommending teaching standards-based arts education at the elementary level, but data that tracks all instructional delivery statewide in California evidences a lapse in accountability for elementary arts education (Create CA, 2019). There is some dependability of student access to arts education instruction in California at the secondary level (Landon & Russell, 2008; Education Commission of the States, 2020), yet it is unclear how public-school central office administrators prioritize their decision-making for elementary arts education as there is limited data collection to measure it. A better understanding of administrators' prioritization practices in decision-making may help administrators proceed from a more informed perspective, thus remedying the inconsistent implementation and inequitable access to arts education in public elementary school.

Research Questions

- What factors affect central office administrators' prioritization practices in decision-making regarding the implementation of standards-based elementary arts education curriculum and instruction in urban-suburban elementary schools?
- What do arts education coordinators/designees perceive as their influence upon decision-making regarding elementary arts education in central offices of instruction?
- How do central office administrators and arts education coordinators/designees perceive the arts learning experiences of racially and economically minoritized elementary students?

Chapter Overview and Organization

This chapter begins by placing the study within the context of its purpose, significance to the field, and alignment to the research questions. The following sections are included in chapter 3: a) description and rationale for the research tradition; b) background information and justification for the multi-site research setting; c) the research sample and data sources; d) the data collection instruments and procedures; e) the methods for obtaining and analyzing data; f) data collection and analysis procedures; and g) the role of the researcher.

Research Tradition and Design

This qualitative study used a grounded theory approach to gather, analyze, and thematically group data collected about central office administrators during administrative decision-making and that of arts education coordinators/designees within offices of instruction. The utilization of qualitative research strategies helps to capture the stories, attitudes, knowledge, perceptions and behaviors of central office administrators and arts education

coordinators/designees within the context of their prioritization practices in decision-making regarding elementary arts education.

Definition and Description of Grounded Theory

Grounded theory, a term originally coined by Glaser and Strauss in 1967, seeks to “[understand] relationships, people, processes, events, and so on [to shape] outcomes of places of work” (Durdella, 2019, pg. 101). Its purpose is to “inductively generate theory that is grounded in, or emerges from, the data” (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019, p. 55). In grounded theory, the researcher flexibly moves from data collection to analysis and then thematic coding within a theoretical context or framework. Ideally, the researcher extends analysis of thematic trends in the data from mere description of events or perceptions into developing a theoretical framework of understanding about the topic (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). Developing a working theoretical framework is a central value in grounded theory. In addition to theoretical development, grounded theory is also characterized by a recursive process of data collection and analysis that is in a state of constant comparative analysis of the data collected. Constant comparative analysis “involves an interplay among the researcher, the data, the emerging categories, and the developing theory (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019, p. 106).

A theoretical sampling of the data captured data that represents the many differing perceptions and experiences of the participants. Theoretical sampling is when a researcher “jointly collect[s] and code[s] data to direct what happens sequentially in data collection” (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p. 45). Development of a theoretical framework, theoretical sampling of the data, and a constant comparative analysis of the data are seminal strategies in a grounded theory methodology.

Theory of Practice

Use of a grounded theory strategy is appropriate for this study as the main research question explores human perception and influences on professional/personal practices. Participant responses were unpredictable and, as such, a grounded theory approach provided a structure for building the narrative of the study around themes that were generated from the data collected. Utilizing this research tradition helped the researcher leverage examination of behaviors and ways of being that are not standardized against attributes of decision-making that are commonly held. Examining the perceptions of administrators and arts education coordinators/designees, or other administrator types such as content leads, or directors of instruction, can provide additional dimension to the overall understanding of prioritization and decision-making regarding elementary arts education.

Grounded theory is well-suited to looking at educational issues, such as the topic of this study, as it provides a structure for looking at human behaviors in education that may exhibit seemingly random habits with no obviously discernable patterns of action (Durdella, 2019). It is fitting for this study as there is no other methodological approach sufficient to represent the many administrative practices employed by central office administrators or arts education coordinators/designees and under as many varying scenarios. Creswell (2007) and Creswell and Creswell (2018) assert that grounded theory is best used when there is no general framework available to explain why people are behaving as they do, and that, in fact, developing a theoretical framework is one endpoint of the data analysis.

In grounded theory, a researcher builds the narrative as the data presents itself. The concept is not a precursor to the study but is resultant from studying the phenomena that are attributes of the topic at hand. Interviews, observations, and other methods of data collection,

such as document review, provide the data. There is an ongoing cycle of data collection, transcription, preliminary analysis for coding and possible member checks for accuracy and validity. Visiting each component of the cycle further informs the next cycle of data collection. It is in this manner that the narrative of the human behavior being examined in this study is shaped.

Application of Theory to Study

Use of a grounded theory framework was most effective as each story told was unique to that participant's experience, their school district, and their knowledge of and belief system about elementary arts education in the curriculum. Additionally, participant responses served to guide further exploration as the researcher learned more about the environment of decision-making in which central office administrators and arts education coordinators/designees must operate.

This study utilized a constructivist-interpretive approach, looking at the human elements of decision-making that influence choice. A constructivist-interpretive approach is one where the researcher looks for a “complexity of views rather than narrowing meanings into a few categories or ideas ... [also] recogniz[ing] their own backgrounds shape the interpretation” (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p. 8). It is hoped that the findings will provide an understanding of administrative practices that heretofore have limited and/or diminished elementary student access and offer insight into improved administrative behaviors.

Research Setting and Context

The multi-site research setting for this study included five school districts in Southern California, each of which employ at least one central office administrator responsible for the implementation, curriculum, and instruction of standards-based arts education in their districts' elementary schools. This study utilized a mixed-sampling strategy of both criterion sampling and network sampling to select the sites, and district superintendents were contacted by email

requesting the opportunity to conduct research (Appendix B). A mixed-sampling strategy is when a researcher utilizes two or more approaches to select sites or participants. This is done to increase the possibility of collecting data that reveals the nuances and complexities of each participant's perceptions of the topic in relationship to the research questions and the study's theoretical framework. Virtual recruitment strategies were utilized due to COVID-19 restrictions.

The primary sampling strategy for the multi-site selection in this research study is criterion sampling. Durdella (2019) states “[c]riterion sampling directs researchers to select a site or sites that meet(s) inclusion criteria to be eligible to be used as a site in the study” (p. 156) ... [grounded theory is] a method to analyze data to uncover patterns of interrelated actions or events” (p. 101). This works best when all site participants exhibit similar characteristics or with those who have similar experiences (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019). The criteria for selecting appropriate district sites for observation included: a) suburban; b) possessing some degree of arts education program implementation at the elementary level; and c) have someone acting in the capacity of arts education administrator or as a coordinator or designee.

The secondary sampling strategy was network sampling. The likelihood that the researcher would be referred during data gathering to another district site amenable to allowing data collection was high. In truth, not all administrators are comfortable having a conversation about how and why they make their decisions, especially around elementary arts education. Network sampling provided the flexibility to act upon the referral of others from within the field (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019).

Districts Eligible from a Mixed Sampling

Criterion Sampling

District 1 is Sunny Beach Unified School District (USD) (a pseudonym). The district is ensconced amidst a tony suburban beach community with a student population of approximately 9,000 Transitional Kindergarten through 12th grade students. There are eleven early childhood centers, nine elementary schools, three middle schools, two comprehensive high schools, a continuation high school, a K-8 alternative school, a Project-Based Learning Pathway school, and an adult school. The total population is diverse and three elementary schools qualify for Title I funds. Each campus has visual and performing arts classes with instruction beginning at the elementary level. Instruction is partially funded by a 501(c)3 organization with additional donation-funded instruction present in after-school programming. Half of all 9,000 students participate specifically in the district's music program while a community arts organization provides visual art and theatre for all elementary students (retrieved from district website).

District 2 is Rolling Hills USD (a pseudonym). Rolling Hills USD is a K-12 suburban district in a small but vibrant and growing city nestled in the foothills of an also small but geographically significant mountain range. Rolling Hills serves a diverse population of nearly 26,000 students, preschool through 12th grade, with well-intentioned, articulated opportunities for students in the neighboring junior colleges. Rolling Hills USD is made up of twenty-one elementary schools, four middle schools, one independent study middle school, three comprehensive high schools, one magnet high school, one continuation high school, one independent study high school, with specialized programs to include a developmental center for multi-handicapped students, and numerous child-care centers serving preschool or school-age children. While 17 of 32 schools qualify for Title I funds, nine schools have also been identified as National Blue Ribbon schools. Per the guidelines for graduation in California, high school students may take one year of foreign language or the arts, but if students take a year of foreign

language, the district additionally requires they must take one semester of an art form. The middle schools provide for one elective each semester (except for one select middle school that has two elective opportunities), which may include the arts, amongst other content choices, so that students may explore various opportunities. Instruction in the visual and performing arts, when present, are given grades for effort at the elementary level (retrieved from district website).

District 3 is Providencia Ranch Unified Schools (PRUS) (a pseudonym). Situated in the middle of a vast, flat valley, and surrounded by even larger cities on all sides, PRUS serves the suburban community of Providencia City, a small but densely populated town with relatively high earnings per capita due to the prosperous nature of the local economy. PRUS provides a comprehensive, balanced educational program to 15,127 students, Transitional Kindergarten through 12th grade. A diverse and culturally-enriched student population attends eleven K-5 elementary schools, three middle schools, two comprehensive high schools, and a continuation school (retrieved from district website).

District 4 is Naranjo USD (a pseudonym). Naranjo USD is built atop a fertile valley situated between two mountain ranges. The school district was constructed to accommodate a burgeoning oil industry and its transient employees as it pushed out the then-inhabitants of a primarily agricultural business community of growing, processing, and shipping citrus. A suburban school district of two high schools, one middle school and six elementary schools, Naranjo has a district enrollment of 5,081 students. All schools are designated Title I with 87% of all students identifying as Hispanic (retrieved from district website). Arts instruction occurs during the school day K-12, as well as in after-school programming. The high schools provide instruction to ensure all students meet the California Department of Education requirement for

graduation in either visual art, theatre, media art, and music while the elementary schools have a vocal music teacher K-2 and an orchestra for select students in grades 3-5.

Network Sampling

A preliminary group of districts was determined, and their administrators and arts coordinators/designees interviewed. It was anticipated that a second strategy, network sampling, would also be necessary, as these participants would undoubtedly refer to other districts reflecting similar attributes in the field. The addition of new sites through these strategies could shed light on the differing subtleties and distinctions between districts as well as indicate trends in decision-making that may make one district more successful in program implementation than another. Communication with the districts was necessary as they were added to the list for possible research study to determine their allowance for research practices. It was necessary to identify “gatekeepers” (Durdella, 2019, p. 242) who could assist the researcher in gaining access to district administrators or documents for review (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Gatekeepers were initially contacted by email to set up a time to discuss scheduling interviews and observations (see Appendix C). Upon identification, participants were invited to participate by email (Appendix D). Due to COVID-19, many district buildings were closed and gatekeepers unavailable. It was anticipated the participants might also be needed to assist in gaining access and trust from their districts.

Research Sample and Data Sources

Participant Sample

This qualitative study utilized a mixed-sampling strategy comprised of theoretical sampling, criterion sampling, and network sampling to select participants, thus ensuring a gathering of the richest data possible (Patton, 2014). Participant data was collected through

individual interviews with 7 central office administrators and a focus group of 5 arts education coordinator/designees. Using a criterion sampling approach, participants were invited to participate by email (Appendix E) and selected from the membership of two California state arts advocacy organizations. Eligibility to participate was based on criteria related to the administrative role they played within their respective school districts. “Gatekeepers” (Durdella, 2019, p. 242), or persons providing access to districts and personnel for the purposes of interviewing, were also participants in the data collection process.

Central office administrators had to act at least within a K-5 capacity within offices of instruction and implement an elementary arts education program for their district. Criteria for participation on the part of arts education coordinators/designees in the focus group was as follows: a) they must act as an arts education coordinator/designee, in an administrative capacity or as a designee to the office of instruction of an urban-suburban middle-sized school district in California; b) they must oversee/participate in the development, implementation, and sustainability of elementary arts education for a school district; and c) they must be responsible for the accountability or evaluation of arts education programming. All participants interviewed were eligible for the study as they have all had opportunity to make decisions regarding implementation of elementary arts education programs and were able to discuss and share perceptions of their work.

Additional participants were located through network sampling by referrals from the arts advocacy organizations or were facilitated by known professional relationships with the researcher. Theoretical sampling was utilized as increased data sources were to be expected; participants referred the researcher to other professionals in the field. These added professionals provided vital information for shaping the theoretical framework and the narrative of the study

(Glaser & Strauss, 1967). The addition of participants further increased the opportunity to triangulate data analysis to ensure validity and assist in shaping the overall direction of the final narrative. Participants were expected to have many common experiences, yet the context of those experiences vary greatly. Identifying the nuances of context was anticipated to be reflected in the findings of this study.

Privacy and Confidentiality

To ensure the rights and privacy of all participants, this research study went through the Institutional Review Board (IRB) process. The research report identified participants and resource districts with pseudonyms and all identification of human subjects was redacted. Random numbers were assigned to each district and participants, with a reference list of the assignments kept in a separate location from the data. Upon completion of the study, the list will be shredded. Interviews, the focus group, and the observations were recorded, and field notes concurrently written. Upon completion of the study, the recordings will be stored in a locked cabinet with the researcher. Identification of the participants was marked in the field notes with their pseudonym.

Data Collection Instruments

Data collection was conducted by administrative interviews of central office personnel, a focus group of arts education coordinator/designees, observations of strategic planning meetings on instruction, and an examination of organizational documents. The use of multiple data collection instruments supported the grounded theory research tradition, as triangulating the data from multiple sources provided cross-checking for validity of the data, thus making the findings more trustworthy. Triangulation is when data is collected from multiple data points within a variety of approaches. “This strategy reduces the risk of chance associations and a system of

biases due to a specific method” (Maxwell, 2013, p. 128). Further data review from peers in the field provided an added measure of cross-checking, adding even greater validity to subsequent data analysis.

Each data collection tool utilized a protocol, interview, or observation guide to ensure that tasks remained on time and that responses were in relationship to the research questions and consistent to like data points. A tool for guiding the research is just like any other investigative protocol, keeping a study focused and without bias (Spradley, 1980). Since a guide was used, the procedures and protocols were definitive, and participants were likely to exhibit greater trust in participating.

Administrator Interview Protocol

The researcher purposefully allowed flexibility in the flow of participant responses so as to gain the richest descriptions possible. A “structured approach [was utilized] ...to ensure the comparability of data across individuals, time, and settings” (Maxwell, 2013, p. 88). This approach strengthened the study’s validity. An interview guide was designed (see Appendix X) to provide structure and consisted of a progressive sequence of questions serving to motivate the participants into deeper responses and “account for the flow of the interview” (Durdella, 2019, p. 228).

The line of questioning in the interview guide was semi-structured, allowing for flexibility. Developed in a sequential manner, it led from knowledge questions to those requiring responses reflecting depth of experience, perceptions, and participant feelings about their work (Glesne, 2015). The questions were aligned to the main research topic and sub-research questions and designed to provide insight into administrator self-awareness during decision-

making and the perceptions of the experiences of arts education coordinators/designees when engaging in decision-making with other content administrators.

Focus Group Protocol

A focus group protocol was designed to guide the researcher through questioning arts education coordinators/designees and to navigate responses to extract as much information and human perspective as possible (see Appendix C). Kreuger and Casey (2015) advise the use of a “questioning route” (p. 43) of no more than ten questions in a focus group tool that included five attributes progressing from one to the next, in order, deepening potential responses as the questions continued. The question attributes were; 1) opening; 2) introduction; 3) transition; 4) key; and 5) ending. The nature of the question, and its order in the sequence, was designed to elicit progressively more descriptive information from the group as the researcher proceeded through the interview (p. 44-46).

Questions for group dialogue were generated based upon the literature review and the researcher’s prior experience in the field. The three main categories anticipated as focus for the questions were: a) tasks of arts education coordinator/designee; b) coordinator observation of decision-making practices for elementary arts education in offices of instruction; and c) arts education coordinator/designee perceptions of the influence of their work on central office administrative decision-making. Additionally, when time and social interaction permitted, members of the focus group were allowed to offer their own opinions of what topics needed to be addressed in further research.

Eligible participants must be or had to have been an arts education coordinator or designee within an office of instruction in a California school district. When conducting the interview, the role of the researcher was “that of a collaborator whose conversational actions

facilitate others in the telling of their stories” (Glesne, 2016, p. 113). Participants were asked to discuss their perceptions of the challenges in prioritization and decision-making for elementary arts education in their respective districts. Additionally, they were asked to elaborate on how they think their work influences the decision-making of other administrators in the office of instruction.

Strategic Planning Meeting Observation and Descriptive Observation Question Guide

To fully understand the breadth of decision-making and its impact on their work, this study was to explore the behaviors of arts education coordinators/designees in (or not in) attendance with administrators in other content areas or directors of instruction, during strategic planning meetings. The researcher had relationships (Durdella, 2019) with instructional leaders in districts hoping to provide access to office of instruction meetings and assist in the exploration of perceptions of directors or comparable administrative positions. A descriptive observation guide (Spradley, 1980) was developed to assist in what to listen and look for when taking comprehensive field notes during observations. It was to assist in connecting the research questions to thematic data presented by those being observed. The questions were designed to address the main research question and primary sub-research questions (see Appendix X).

Laid out in a grid, the guide was designed to assist in observing characteristics of a meeting such as location (online via ZOOM), attendees, time, and agenda. It recognized people in their roles in relationship with others, their goals, and how they express their thoughts and feelings. The guiding questions sought to illuminate the nuances expressed between administrators as they planned for instruction in the district’s schools. They did not presuppose what subject matter would be covered in the meeting; rather, the field notes were to highlight

what was indicated as valuable during meetings and how people behaved in their reactions to others.

Document Review Protocol

District organizational and instructional documents were examined and compared, district to district, for greater understanding of program intent, goals, and implementation practices (Alkin & Vo, 2018). Documents gathered for examination included: a) strategic planning agendas; b) program implementation procedures; c) budgeting artifacts; d) personnel schedules; e) materials, equipment, and supply accounting; f) organizational chart; and g) community outreach notices. The themes of program development, implementation, sustainability, and assessment were recognized and potential markers for program success were identified. These markers were leveraged against other programmatic components to help create findings of interest for districts seeking to provide access to high-quality elementary arts instruction for all students. A checklist of anticipated markers was created, while unexpected markers compiled, to determine common usage amongst districts. Trend in usage was analyzed for indication of programmatic structure (see Appendix X).

Data Collection Procedures

There were four components to the data collection process: a) administrator interview procedures; b) focus group interview procedures; c) planning meeting observation procedures; and d) document review procedures. Each component was guided by a data instrument tool for accuracy. All interviews and the focus group were recorded and, when permission was granted, observations of the planning meetings were also recorded. Additionally, interviews were semi-structured to allow for easy flow of information. The researcher maintained a journal of field notes scripted during all data collection to provide an added dimension of understanding during

the foreseeable data analysis. All identifying markers of participants and districts were redacted or renamed with a pseudonym.

Administrator Interview Procedures

The questions used in data collection were open-ended, allowing participants to tell stories in the way they are experiencing decision-making. Allowances were made for them to ask questions that they wanted to ask about their work, which, in turn, could be asked of others. They were encouraged, with permission, to provide documents explicative of their experience. The researcher anticipated needing more than one meeting with each participant to complete the data gathering, and they were asked to read over their transcript notes to ensure the story they were telling was complete. Sampling the data sources and triangulating the data collected mitigated researcher bias by checking the research questions and data collection instruments to ensure they were not leading, but open enough for the participants to disclose as much as possible (Durdella, 2019).

To ensure adequate data for coding and data credibility, 7 participants were personally interviewed. Due to COVID-19 restrictions, interviews were conducted through the video-conferencing application ZOOM. They included non-arts content administrators, such as directors of instruction or other instructional leaders, and arts education coordinators/designees acting in an administrative capacity. The researcher invited participants by email or phone call to set up a time and place to conduct the interviews (Attachment A). Peer sponsors were asked to pilot interview questions and provide feedback on relevancy to the field, bias, and sensitivity to the topic (Maxwell, 2013). As responses were gathered from the participants, theoretical sampling helped to shape categories out of the common threads of conversation. The researcher needed to be careful to identify categories of perception and understanding that may not have

been a part of the researcher's own experience as an arts education coordinator. To make sure that significant themes were well-supported, the researcher continued to access the literature and incorporate it into the study so that future researchers can make connections with the findings.

These parameters were defined by the participants as it was their schedules that determined when and how the interviews would occur. Time was allowed for catching up on relationships from the field or to make new introductions. Common understandings were touched upon to have a starting point for the interview.

Focus Group Interview Procedures

The focus group was comprised of 5 participants specifically identified as designated arts education coordinators/designees within their district. They were solicited through one of two California arts advocacy and education groups. Participants were reminded that it was a voluntary opportunity, and each signed an electronic intent to participate. They were apprised that their anonymity would be protected through assignment of a pseudonym for use, instead of their real names, when data was analyzed, and the findings of the study were communicated.

The focus group occurred remotely thru the online ZOOM video-conference platform. Upon sign-in to the focus group meeting, there was verbal notice to the focus group reminding them of confidentiality. Additionally, norms for videoconferencing were outlined. Participants were comprised of self-identified arts education administrators or designees. They self-selected to engage in a standardized, open-ended interview discussion around several topics challenging to arts education coordinators/designees tasked with developing, implementing, and sustaining elementary arts education programs in mid-sized, California urban-suburban school districts.

“The open-ended approach allow[ed] the subject[s] ample opportunity to comment, to explain,

and to share experiences and attitudes” (Krueger, 2015, p. 5) about their work as arts education coordinator/designee (Appendix B).

Strategic Planning Meeting Observation Procedures

Strategic planning is a process of long and short-term planning driven by vision, mission, and goals and educational opportunities. The meetings were to be observed for structure, agenda topics, attendees, and rapport amongst participants. The protocol style of observation the researcher assumed was to be the role of a complete observer (Creswell, 2018). A complete observer is a researcher who does not participate in any way with the conversation, but who may record observation data or write memo. Complete observation can serve to reduce bias as active observation and notetaking, rather than participating in the meeting, will allow the researcher to observe things not normally seen when actively engaging with others. Notes may include “jotting down key words or sketching images ... [to] use as triggers to write up fuller notes (Alkin & Vo, 2018, p. 133). Spradley (1980) suggests creating an observation guide (Appendix X) to provide a structured lens for the researcher to document the progression of the meeting. One or two research-question-informed foci were to serve as a point of initial interest, but the goal was to detect nuance in interactions, such as “routine, rituals, events, space” (Durdella, 2019, p. 223) between people that differ from moment to moment.

Entering the field was attempted through diplomatic means with a designated administrator/gatekeeper able to provide access, as strategic planning meeting agendas are usually very protected, and attendance is exclusive (Spradley, 1980). Unfortunately, due to the effects of COVID-19 and online meetings, time constraints, and district reluctance to allow access, no strategic planning meetings could be observed. However, all administrators and focus

group participants referred to their experiences while in strategic planning meetings, and those responses are reflected upon in Chapters IV and V.

Extant Document Review Procedures

The extant document review procedure can potentially reveal district intent as an examination of organizational and instructional samples may represent how elementary arts education programming is developed, implemented, and assessed. Documents were examined for cross-district alignment to greater understand implementation practices within a district or to compare practices between districts to identify commonality or success rate. Document review is one data analysis strategy utilized to triangulate data between sources and can “confirm insights gained through other methods of data collection” (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019, p. 197). As each document was reviewed using the document review tool, recurring themes in implementation were detected, as well as who creates these documents, disseminates them, and is the intended audience. All identifying markers of district ownership were redacted.

Data Analysis Procedures

Data Analysis Tradition

The researcher has experience as an arts education coordinator, and this developed perspective provided a starting point for analysis. The main concepts of this study were built concurrently with the gathering and iterative analysis of the data. A constant-comparative method of analysis was used to analyze the data, and coding markers were assigned to assist in creating categories based on commonality or trend in occurrence. A constant comparative approach is an “ongoing comparison of data with emerging categories” (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019, p. 56). A “constant comparative analytical approach merges segmenting, coding, categorizing, and thematizing with a process of developing an overall theory or explanation

about what is happening” (Glaser & Strauss, p. 102). Theoretical sampling of the commonly coded themes provided the information necessary to engage in constant comparative analysis as the narrative of the study was constructed. As themes began to emerge, a constructivist-interpretive approach (Creswell, 2007) was used to make sense of those themes and to build a narrative from the findings.

Maxwell (2013) emphasizes that “reading and thinking about your interview transcripts and observation notes, writing memos, developing coding categories and applying these to your data, analyzing narrative structure and contextual relationships, and creating matrices and other displays are all important forms of data analysis” (p. 105). Collection of multiple data points through a variety of collection strategies served to cross-check the data and ensured validity of the data. Triangulating data collection methodologies provided “a confluence of evidence that breeds credibility” (Eisner, 1991, p.291, as cited by Bowen, 2017, p. 28). “By examining information collected through different methods, [the study can] corroborate findings across data sets and thus reduce the impact of potential biases that can exist in a single study” (Bowen, 2017, p. 28).

The job of an arts education coordinator is not standardized across districts, nor are there dependable habits in decision-making in relationship with other content administrators. Therefore, the overall strategy for constant comparative data analysis protocol is necessary to make meaning from disparate details from the respondents. The researcher “moves from descriptive to explanatory results of data analysis” in the last two phases of the analysis (Durdella, 2019, p. 104) to develop the final narrative. Durdella outlines three steps in constant comparative analysis that help create categories of relative themes that synthesize into a

description of the phenomena; a) thematic data analysis; b) categorical themes that form an explicative model; and c) larger categories form relationships.

Data Analysis: Administrator Interviews

Audio or video recordings, field notes, and any other data collected as a result of the administrator interviews were processed and transcribed by the researcher in a constant comparative approach, allowing for preliminary coding and analysis of the data as it was retrieved. Coding of identified trends was aligned to data from the literature review to shape the study's narrative. Particular attention was paid to the use of any trigger words in researcher journaling during the interviews. Preliminary attributes of the codes were also identified, and a structure for developing the themes was created. Daily journaling during the analytic process "not only capture[d] [the researcher's] analytic thoughts, but also facilitate[d] such thinking, stimulating analytic insights" (Maxwell, 2013, p. 105).

Data Analysis: Focus Group

Data collected through the focus group was gathered by audiotaping, videorecording, and note-taking. After conversation progressed, the focus group participants were asked to discuss topics they thought need to be examined to continue furthering and informing their work. It was interesting to see if what they thought was important was what they actually talked about in the focus group. Much like coding the raw data from the interview notes, the open-ended questions underwent transcription by the researcher as well as a word frequency analysis by using NVIVO 12. The themes discovered in the focus group were leveraged against the administrative interviews and document review notes, and common trends were identified. For cross-checking purposes, particular attention was again paid to the use of any trigger words in researcher

journaling during the focus group. Once again, identified trends were used to form the direction of the narrative of this study.

Data Analysis: Observations

The researcher transcribed all data and assigned coding by using NVIVO 12. Categories identified through this coding process were leveraged against any categories identified through the literature review. As this data collection is expected to reveal much about administrative decision-making in general, it was important to use peer review of the data as a cross-check to ensure appropriate identification of the most impactful themes to highlight.

Data Analysis: Document Review

Districts will have various means of planning for instruction and methods for guiding schools in program implementation. Eisner (1991) advises that examination of documents should “draw upon multiple sources of evidence ... to seek convergence and corroboration through the use of different data sources and methods” (p. 110). It is anticipated that some districts may not intentionally utilize a planning protocol for elementary arts education, but they implement programming, nonetheless. Documents are evidence that can be a means of deducing the landscape of decision-making. While planning may not be standardized, almost all planning ends in meeting some form of instructional goals and therefore may be examined. Much like coding and identifying themes from collected data from interviews or observations, document review can also be grouped into themes and analyzed for trend or pattern. A rubric was developed, as Bowen suggests, to provide a standardized assessment.

There are three primary types of documents:

- **Public Records:** The official, ongoing records of an organization's activities. Examples include student transcripts, mission statements, annual reports, policy manuals, student handbooks, strategic plans, and syllabi.
- **Personal Documents:** First-person accounts of an individual's actions, experiences, and beliefs. Examples include calendars, e-mails, scrapbooks, blogs, Facebook posts, duty logs, incident reports, reflections/journals, and newspapers.
- **Physical Evidence:** Physical objects found within the study setting (often called artifacts). Examples include flyers, posters, agendas, handbooks, and training materials (Bowen, 2017).

While gatekeepers assisted in providing access to participants for administrative interviews, they were also key to requesting organizational documents from offices of instruction. Evidence was available online for broad use by the educational community; of greater value were organizational documents internal to the inner workings of the office of instruction. These documents revealed the weight of the priority of instructional choice-making on programming. If there were no documents, questionable priority might be assumed, thus value might be assumed about any given instructional initiative. Formative internal fiscal documents outlined the progressive approval or disapproval of funding of instructional programming as the decision-making tree narrowed over time. Any document secured for review had identifying information redacted to ensure anonymity of the district or persons fielding the document.

Data Analysis Protocol

Transcription of the data was conducted in a hybrid naturalized/denaturalized process (Davidson, 2009). This means that all data, either written or observed, was equally transcribed, to include such habits of speech as pausing, stuttering, self-correcting, or use of hesitations

words such as “um” or “like.” Oliver et al. (2005) assert that a denaturalized approach, recognizing all the hesitations, reflect that “within speech, are meanings and perceptions that construct our reality ... [While a naturalized approach to participant speech] represents the real world” (p. 1274). A transcription of the qualitative data was created by the researcher process recorded data using REV.com, a transcription service. The transcription was reviewed by alternating back and forth between listening to the recording and making separate comments of analysis or corrections on a formatted note sheet. All spoken word was documented, including pauses in speech.

The researcher engaged in post-interview journaling as a part of a constant comparative analysis. The approach to the analysis of the data was that of abductive analysis of the data. Abductive analysis is “a form of reasoning that is concerned with the relationship between situation and inquiry” (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019, p. 233). This approach is a means to making sense of the data within context of the research problem and questions. Data transcribed from interviews, the focus group, and document review data, was uploaded into the NVIVO 12 platform where a word frequency action was conducted to identify key terms that were regularly used in the interviews. Words that garnered the most frequent use were checked in reference to the literature review, while words used on a limited basis but that possess great meaning were also examined for synonyms. The most frequently used terms were queried and a baseline for usage identified as a significant node. The text was segmented according to the frequency of word usage and the specific node assigned. Common themes under each node were identified and assigned as sub-nodes. Their relationships to each other were viewed in multiple conceptual forms, such as in a word cloud or in a stratified word list, and then placed in a concept map for categorizing and relationship building.

Final processing of the data included two methods of checking for accuracy. The text was confirmed for accuracy against the audio file and field notes or peer review, while preliminary notes on analysis were codified. Member checks were conducted with participants from the administrative interviews, while data from the focus group was checked for accuracy and representation by a non-participatory, secondary observer to the researcher.

Roles of the Researcher

The researcher of this study has experienced working in a central office of instruction as a K12 arts education administrator, having participated in central office decision-making and seen the resultant increase or decrease in student access based upon those decisions. Additionally, the researcher has benefited from examining district, school, and student data over time and identified trends in decision-making when practices appear to hold sway over student access and academic achievement. Lysaght (2011) states that "a researcher's choice of framework is not arbitrary but reflects important personal beliefs and understandings about the nature of knowledge, how it exists ... in relation to the observer, and the possible roles to be adopted, and tools to be employed consequently, by the researcher in [their] work" (p. 572). This study's researcher relied upon prior experience to guide the leveraging of the theoretical framework against the research problem, questions, and analysis of the data.

Researcher Effects

The researcher's role in planning this study was to design a methodology that utilized the researcher's experience and skillset earned whilst listening to and problem-solving with administrators as they communicated their attempts to develop, implement, and sustain programming in schools. It is necessary to acknowledge the researcher's role as a contributor to the development of the theoretical framework and that the researcher harkened to past experience

when writing the questions in the study. Central to the researcher's task is to explore the theoretical complexities embedded within the research questions by examining comparative literature and cultivating vigorous interview questions for the research participants. The researcher's continual theoretical sampling of the common coded themes provided the information necessary to engage in a constant comparative analysis as the narrative of the study is constructed. The main concepts and resultant conceptual framework of this study were built concurrently with the gathering and iterative analysis of the data from the literature review. There are many attributes of elementary arts education in learning or in identifying uniform administrative practices employed by central office administrators and arts education coordinator's/designee's decision-making. Identifying the three theories is resultant of the researcher's coding of data from the literature review coupled with the researcher's use of prior knowledge to shape the data analysis. This is significant. Timmermans and Tavory (2012) speak about the reticence of researchers to engage in identifying an operating theory within a grounded theory tradition as it might encourage the researcher to restrict the building of the data narrative if it does not fit the confines of the theory. They advise researcher "abduction" (p. 170) of prior knowledge, theory constraints, and data analysis, thus allowing the development of new knowledge or theory to grow from the information. Abduction is when coding and grouping of themes gleaned from data is partnered with the researcher's prior knowledge to form new understandings.

Abduction thus depends on the researcher's cultivated position. The disposition to perceive the world and its variations--including the very reflection on one's position in this world--is predicated on the researcher's biography as well as an affinity and familiarity with broader academic fields. Abducted analysis consistently rests, for a

large part, on the scope and sophistication of the theoretical background a researcher brings to research. Unanticipated and surprising observations are strategic in that they depend on a theoretically sensitized observer who recognizes their potential relevance. (Timmermans & Tavory, 2012, p. 173)

Participant Effects

A grounded theory framework guided the exploration of perceptions of arts education coordinators/designees as responses from interviewees are likely to be differentiated in their points of view. The researcher drew upon personal experience and framed the research around known precepts likely to inform the exploration. Based on what the researcher knows about elementary arts education program development, questions were carefully constructed to elicit the most complex responses possible from respondents. As well, each site was different for each participant, for even though they do similar work, they operate within different offices of instruction. Some school districts do not have the luxury of hiring a position designated solely to arts education; they have a designee who may or may not have any experience in the content areas. The questions were crafted to allow for those differences. The researcher's background knowledge facilitated the use of commonly known terminology, thus making the environment more comfortable for the participants. Being able to distinguish this during interviewing was important, as it cannot be assumed that districts of any size and administrators of any type may use and understand the same terminology in relation to program development.

Potential Researcher Bias

The role of the researcher in this study was challenging as there is the potential for bias in analysis of the decision-making that was observed. The researcher held the position of arts education coordinator for many years and had opportunity to develop perspective and opinions

about what a district and administrators can and should do. For 13 years, the researcher had opportunity to be part of a collaborative, central office administrative team, implementing a centrally-managed elementary arts program for all schools within the district. During those years, the researcher attended many meetings across the state and the team collaborated with national figures in the arts to develop superior curriculum and implementation structures for arts programming.

As the program's coordinator, the researcher was responsible for interfacing with the many personnel positions within schools and the office of instruction--superintendents, directors, principals, office managers, lead teachers and both school-based and itinerant arts teachers. Of importance is how many administrators the researcher was able to talk to, both site-based and centrally-located. This shaped the researcher's understanding of what administrators may value and how that valuing impacts administrator decision-making on behalf of elementary arts education. Conversations with these administrators often revolved around deciding how schools were going to prioritize resources to pay for instruction and where to put it in the school schedule, but conversations were also deeply instructionally-based about what instruction was going to occur and why. There were not just hundreds of conversations but, literally, thousands upon thousands of them. A good portion of these conversations were held in the field, face-to-face on the campus, and not just in passing on the phone. Through these conversations, the researcher developed a perspective on the prioritization practices of principals and central office administrators, the challenges they face when making decisions about implementing elementary arts education programs, and how administrator bias may impact decision-making towards elementary arts education. This study, however, sought to gather data from the perspective of the

administrators, not the researcher, and so cross-checking data from multiple viewpoints was essential.

The school district in which the researcher worked required gathering many years' worth of data on what schools needed in terms of materials, equipment, supplies, and artists-in-residence. The researcher assisted principals in writing instructional action plans justifying what they needed, only to see the expenditures denied by central office gatekeepers. Researcher personal experiences are a vital element in understanding the experiences and perceptions of respondents, but they also play a significant role in shaping a researcher's biases and beliefs (Durdella, 2019). Indeed, the potential for researcher bias is great. Yet during those prior years, the researcher also learned that things are not always as they seem. As a former board member once confided in the researcher, decision-makers who appear to be doing things that seem destructive to instruction from one person's point of view may really be acting with the best of intention in doing what they think is right (personal communication, 2012).

Mitigating Bias

While Timmermans and Tavory (2012) recognize the importance of a researcher's contribution to the study through the use of abduction to cultivate the narrative themes, there is the potential for researcher bias to influence the direction of the study. To mitigate researcher bias, this study utilized a constructivist-interpretive approach. While the researcher may have moved between being a non-participant to a collaborative participant during focus group interviews, depending upon the participants' receptivity to the interview questions, all participation on the part of the researcher was tempered in lieu of gaining the most authentic, rich, and complex responses from participants without interference. Bloomberg and Volpe (2019) speak at length about the methodology tradition of grounded theory and the necessary interaction between the researcher,

thematic categories gleaned from the data, and the shaping of a theoretical framework. Additionally, they refer to the "sensitivity" (p. 106) that is required on the part of the researcher to engage in a constant comparative analysis of the data. During participant interviews, it was necessary not to lend a biased eye towards in-the-moment data analysis, but to be aware of the subtleties of each distinctive response and to appropriately document these through recording and memos. Strategies were employed to counter the potential for bias before, during, and after such interviews. Open-ended questions were the primary question structure so as not to lead the participants in their responses. Follow up questions during interviews were not leading, but rather open enough to encourage the respondent to elaborate. Lastly, triangulation strategies such as document collection and analysis and member-checking for accuracy cross-validated responses (Durdella, 2019).

Summary

People do not always know why they feel the way they do. The researcher's perceptions developed from the many conversations the researcher had with administrators about elementary arts education revealed that there is a lot of fear of the unknown, about the content, the pedagogy, and its value in relationship to formally tested subjects. There can be personal emotion connected to decision-making; a need for people to fulfill their emotional attachment or personal belief system in their decisions. They may not want to wait three or four years to see if sequential instruction in elementary arts education actually builds to something that impacts student proficiency or an increase in their social-emotional welfare. In this regard, a qualitative, grounded theory investigation into administrator perceptions of their prioritization in decision-making may assist in reshaping administrator practices and perhaps provide insight to further study of the topic.

Chapter IV: Findings

This chapter describes the findings of a qualitative research study. The study sought to explore administrator prioritization practices in central office administrative decision-making for standards-based elementary arts education through the lens of the conceptual framework. The central thematic domain revealed by this study contends with equitable access to elementary arts education. The organization of the chapter is according to the conceptual theories that prompted the line of inquiry and provides both a summary and rationale for how data was analyzed.

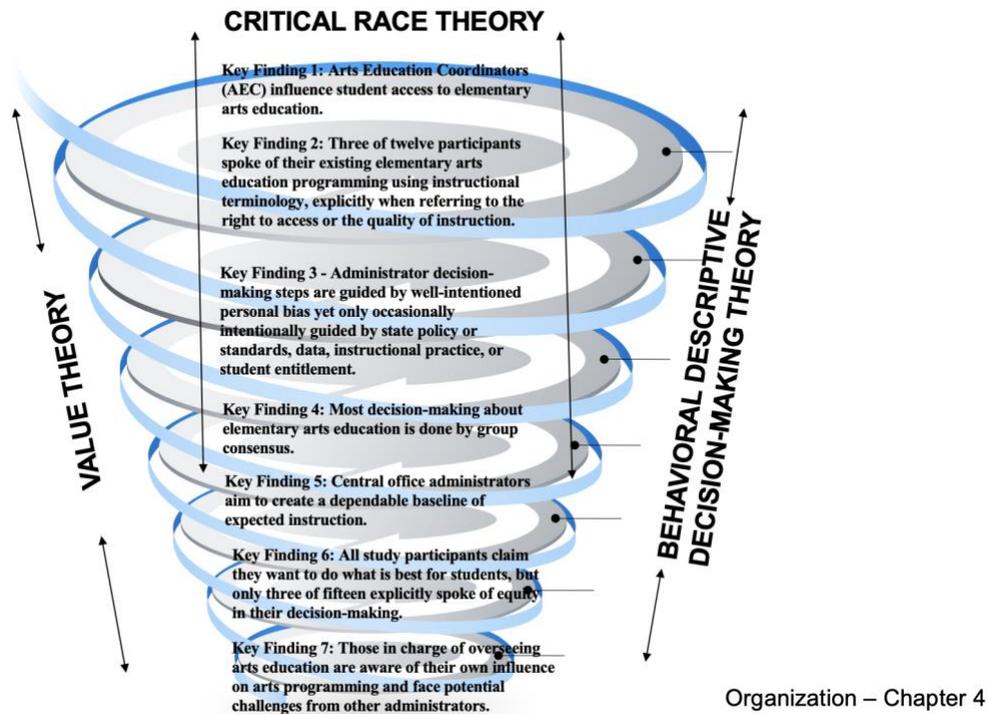
Chapter Organization

This chapter begins by providing a summary of the study, data analysis methods, and rationale. It then contextualizes the findings within the foundational conceptual frameworks by building the narrative upon the interview and focus group questions. The three theoretical concepts are: a) Value Theory, b) Critical Race Theory, and c) Descriptive Behavioral Decision Theory.

The key findings are initially introduced in hierarchical order of most referred to but are not addressed in the narrative by any order of importance, rather, they are presented as outcomes of the interview and focus group questions (See Figure 2). The words of participants are given as evidence within the narrative to support the findings, and where there are no explicit words to refer to a topic, the participants' rhetoric and language, commonality between participants, and overall context of the topic is used to infer meaning (Saldana, 2009).

Figure 2

Organization of Chapter IV



Date created: 2022

Data Collection and Analysis: Methods and Rationale

During analysis and for discussion purposes, the identification of the sites and participants remained anonymous, with each being assigned an alpha numeric code name. The focus group was conducted using the focus group questioning tool (Appendix H) while the administrative interviews were conducted using the interview tool “Interview Protocol: Central Office Administrators (COA)” (Appendix G).

Throughout the narrative, central office administrators are referred to as “administrator participant” or “COA-#” while the focus group participants (arts education coordinators) (AEC) are named “AEC-#” (see Table 3). The word *participant* or *participants* is interchangeable between central office administrators and focus group arts coordinators or when referring to participants as a whole.

Table 3

Data Source Code Names

| DATA SOURCE | | NUMBER |
|---|---|----------|
| District Sites | Strategic Plan in Place | 4 |
| <i>S.B. USD</i> | X | |
| <i>R.H. USD</i> | In progress | |
| <i>P.R. US</i> | X | |
| <i>N.V. USD</i> | | |
| PARTICIPANT IDENTIFICATION NUMBER | | |
| Central Office Administrators (COA) (Interviews) | COA-1 COA-2 COA-3 COA-4 COA-5 COA-6 COA-7 | 7 |
| Arts Education Coordinators (AEC) (Focus group) | AEC-1 AEC-2 AEC-3 AEC-4 AEC-5 | 5 |

Date created: 2022

The document review of the four districts using the review tool, “Document Review Checklist” (Appendix I), consisted of examination of the district’s website, any documents held therein, and the strategic plan for the arts or any Board of Education policy on the arts where it was available. No observations of instructional meetings were conducted as districts were unable to allow access due to COVID restrictions or the inability to provide consent.

Data collected by three data collection tools, a) administrator interviews, b) the arts coordinator focus group, and c) document review of district strategic plans, was analyzed using EXCEL’s filtering capability, handwritten notes, and the data analysis functionalities in NVIVO 12, such as word frequency counts, queries, node development, or thematic classifications. This

data was sufficient to address the research questions and correspondingly establish the findings within the conceptual framework. The themes revealed through the literature review found expression in this data, while a few unexpected yet significant trends were revealed that were not present in the literature review.

The themes, or nodes, leading to the key findings were initially determined by a “first cycle...holistic method” (Saldana, 2009, p.118) of in vivo coding analysis, an “open-ended coding method for grounded theory and other coding methods” (p 138). The researcher “grasp[ed] basic themes or issues in the data by absorbing them as a whole [the coder as a lumper] rather than by analyzing them line by line [the coder as a splitter]” (Dey, 1993, p. 104).

The themes were generated by aggregating the nodes and then engaging in a “provisional coding [style, leveraging them against a] predetermined start list” (Saldana, 2009, p.120) from the literature review nodes. A grid was laid out by participants’ identification numbers with relational topics “lumped” within a corresponding theory (p. 19). A number was placed on the grid where participants had spoken about the topic, either directly or indirectly, as revealed through the rhetoric of participant language. The intent was not to create a hierarchical list of tags on a node, but to mitigate researcher bias. The topic was logged in the cross-check journal if it was more frequently referred or alluded to than other topics. Attributes from the many themes were narrowed to those commonly held characteristics that could be spoken to as an “overarching theme... [creating an] integrative theme that weaves various themes together in a coherent narrative” (pp. 139-140). Ultimately, the themes were aggregated “for meaning condensation... [and] interpretation to explain why something happened or what something means” (Rubin & Rubin, 1995, p.57).

During the “second cycle” of analysis (Saldana, 2009, p. 152), “pattern coding” was utilized to clump nodes within a corresponding theoretical concept; this “require[d] decisions about which initial codes [made] the most sense” (Charmaz, 2006, pp. 46, 57). Dey (1999), which recognizes that topic categories may breach multiple domains and areas of discussion; that “there are different degrees of belonging” (pp.69-70). Allowance was made to consider other theories that might pertain to the data, but it was determined that art and education are broad topics that can be explored through many lenses and that the study’s conceptual framework was sufficient.

It should be stated that this was a challenging analytical cycle for these very reasons. The researcher deemed it best to introduce the various key findings and their iterations in administrative decision-making as they relate to the theories guiding the conceptual framework. While rubrics, guidelines, and standards abound to guide decision-making, each decision-maker is an individual with their own bias, training, and personal experience. Many attributes and elements are cross-applicable such that boundaries of thought can easily shift. Glaser and Strauss (1967) warn that “categories should not be so abstract as to lose their sensitizing aspect, but yet must be abstract enough to make [the emerging theory] a general guide to multi-conditional, ever-changing daily situations” (p.242). Thus, organizing this chapter by the three theories serves to simplify the focus of the analysis narrative (refer back to Figure 1).

Presentation of the Key Findings

Within the narrative, the key findings may realize their expression under more than one theory and be repeated as necessary as the analysis unfolds. The findings from this study are by no means exclusive to any theoretical concept or research question. In fact, this provides for an inherent cross-checking of the data that renders the key findings more reliable. The key findings

found voice within multiple elements in the design of this study (refer to Figure 2), having been referred to by many of the participants for their own various reasons, and may be represented in more than one section of analysis or discussion. To maintain clarity within the web of relationships, the researcher has placed the dominant expression of any key finding within the theoretical category that saw the most references, with sub-topical mentions in other areas of the analysis as needed.

The key findings from the data collection in order of most important resultant from references are:

Key Finding 1: Arts Education Coordinators (AEC) influence student access to elementary arts education.

Key Finding 2: Three of twelve participants spoke of their existing elementary arts education programming using instructional terminology, explicitly when referring to the right to access or the quality of instruction.

Key Finding 3: Administrator decision-making steps are guided by well-intentioned personal bias and only occasionally intentionally guided by state policy or standards, data, instructional practice, or student entitlement.

Key Finding 4: Most decision-making about elementary arts education is done by group consensus.

Key Finding 5: Central office administrators aim to create a dependable baseline of expected instruction.

Key Finding 6: All study participants claim they want to do what is best for students, but only three of twelve explicitly spoke of equity in their decision-making.

Key Finding 7: Arts Education Coordinators (AEC) are aware of their own influence on arts programming and face potential challenges from other administrators.

The Interview and Focus Group Questions

Administrators were asked thirteen questions, each labeled in this narrative as “administrator question” and the question number “#” (administrator question #1, administrator question #2, administrator question #3, etc.) (see Appendix G) and focus group participants (AEC-1, 2, 3, etc.) were asked eleven questions labeled “focus group-question and the question number “#” (focus group-question 1, focus group-question 2, focus group-question 3, etc.) (see Appendix H).

The conclusion of this chapter reports any inconsistent, discrepant, or unexpected findings and lays the foundation for the final chapter by summarizing the thrust of the key findings, encouraging the reader to enter the discussion on the findings in Chapter V.

Value Theory

In this study, value theory provides an approach to exploring how and to what degree administrators and arts coordinators value elementary arts education and express that valuing in their decision-making. The key findings referenced in this section are:

Key Finding 2: Three of twelve participants spoke of their existing elementary arts education programming using instructional terminology, explicitly when referring to the right to access or the quality of instruction.

Key Finding 3: Administrator decision-making steps are guided by well-intentioned personal bias and only occasionally intentionally guided by state policy or standards, data, instructional practice, or student entitlement.

Key Finding 5: Decision-makers aim to create a dependable baseline of expected instruction.

The coding of the data in this study demonstrates that when administrators purposefully value the arts when decision-making, it manifests as an influence upon the equity of student access to instruction, the quality of instruction that is offered, and ultimately student achievement in the content. Saldana (2009) reminds us that “values coding [is a] complex interplay, influence, and effect between and among three constructs that manifest themselves in thought, feeling, and action” (p. 90). Table 4, *Value Theory and Emerging Themes*, lists the emerging themes aligned to Value Theory and demonstrates the most frequently referred to or alluded to themes, but perhaps more importantly, reveals prominent themes from the literature review which were left unrecognized during the administrative interviews and the Focus Group.

Table 4

Value Theory and Emerging Themes

| Explicitly Referred to or Implied THEME | VALUE THEORY | | | | | | | | | | | |
|--|---|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|--|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| | Central Office Administrators (Interviews) | | | | | | | Arts Education Coordinators (Focus group) | | | | |
| | COA-1 | COA-2 | COA-3 | COA-4 | COA-5 | COA-6 | COA-7 | AEC-1 | AEC-2 | AEC-3 | AEC-4 | AEC-5 |
| | Assessing Quality Instruction | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Arts Teachers - Quality, Credentialed, Certification | x | x | | | | x | | | | x | | |
| Assessment of Arts Learning | x | | | | | x | | x | x | | | x |
| Creativity and Innovation: STEAM, Arts Integration, Project Based Learning, Career Tech Ed | | | x | | x | x | | | | | | |
| Credentialed Teachers - central office | x | x | | | | x | | | | x | | |
| Gen Ed Tchrs Teach the Arts | | | x | x | | | | x | | x | | |
| Standards/Framework | x | x | | | | | | | | x | | x |
| Quality in Instruction | x | x | x | | | | | x | x | x | x | x |
| Use of Instructional Terminology to Describe the Arts | x | x | x | | | | | | x | | | x |
| | Sustainability of Programming | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Arts Providers | x | | x | | | | | | | x | | x |
| Creating/maintaining Arts Programming | x | x | | | | | | | | x | | x |
| Decision Making -funding | x | x | | | x | | x | | | | | |
| Generate Funding - (AC's) | x | | | | | | | x | x | x | x | x |
| Sustainability of Arts Programming | x | x | x | | | x | x | x | x | x | x | x |
| | Perception of Value | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Devaluing Arts Education (Explicit) | x | | | | x | | | | | | | |
| Stakeholder Participation | x | x | x | | | | | | | | | x |
| Value and Perception of Elementary Arts | x | x | x | | | | | | | x | | x |

Date created: 2022

While the rhetoric of the participants may not use shared explicit terminology that they all share, it reveals that they share similar experiences, feelings, and actions under similar scenarios of decision-making. It also reveals that “what [a] participant states are their values, attitudes and beliefs may not always be truthful or harmonize with their observed actions and interactions (Saldana, 2009, p. 90).

Sustainability

The significant themes under value theory emergent from the data collection indicate administrators are concerned with sustainability of what current programming they already have in place yet also harbor a vision of what could happen should certain circumstances come about. Key Finding 5, *Decision-makers aim to create a dependable baseline of expected instruction*, reveals that a dependable baseline of instruction comes about in many ways. All administrators and focus group participants referred to the many strategies they employ to sustain the greatest level of implementation and student access as possible, given their perception of the circumstances of time, resources, and personnel. Purposefully creating and maintaining arts instructional programming can indicate the depth of valuing on the part of a district yet sustaining that programming can become a challenge.

Funding

Funding is a primary response to most questions regarding central office decision-making and program sustainability, no matter the initial nature of the question. It is no surprise that a district demonstrates its values by where it places its funding, and funding is one of the keys to creating greater access to instruction. Administrator question 5 asks: *Think of specific time when you were in a planning conversation with other central office administrators and the direction of*

the conversation included elementary arts education programming in your district; what was the circumstance behind the conversation? COA-4 proudly announced, “My coordinator last year was very passionate about [the arts] and kind of helped really facilitate that and actually wrote a grant that we got for elementary arts education.” Unfortunately, that coordinator is no longer in that position so additional fund raising is not mentioned, but COA-3 and their elementary director, COA-4, are striving to maintain that grant and hope to receive assistance from the county to create a strategic plan.

COA-1 is responsible for gaining funds sufficient to implement arts programming in multiple art forms K-12, stating, “I get those funds through my connections and people I work with every year.” But considering how much funding they bring in and the varied nature of the criteria behind those expenditures, there is an expectation that the district will also be contributing. They remind their fiscal department of the responsibility on the part of the district to provide its portion of the budget if donors and grantors are going to keep funding their work, saying:

We need to start investing in capital needs for the arts, you know, materials, supplies, instruments, things that we're currently relying on boosters to do all of that. And if we ever get audited... and [they] find out that the district has contributed nothing for these needs, then we [could] be sued.

One way of valuing elementary arts education is to be held accountable to it. In response to administrator question 13, *In your ideal world, if you could have anything, what do you think would assist you in developing and implementing elementary arts education programming for your district?*, COA-7 prioritizes dependable funding for districts to attain sustainability, also

referring to the responsibility of the district to respect the “strings” attached to receiving funding, saying:

Well, number one would be consistent funding and reliable funding. So, you know, if the state were to say that a per [pupil allocation is just] like a categorical fund, just like they are starting to do with all of our funding anymore [is to] attach strings to it; to say that this has to be spent on, on arts, that would be huge, locally, if we were to make that commitment, would be huge. So just having that consistency and funding and resources dedicated towards that; that’s number one.

COA-7 is very thoughtful about the funding and district commitment to state and local criteria for expenditure, ensuring that students are moving towards proficiency in their math and ELA learning goals. COA-7 makes a value judgement that money must be spent on instruction that makes a *direct* impact on student achievement. But they also recognize the learning needs of minoritized students; that some important learning is *indirect* learning and there must be equity in access to innovative curriculum. They understand the nuance involved in achieving implementation. They liken funding, equity, and student instructional need as a balance that must be achieved. In response to administrator question 7, *Think of a specific time when you were in a planning conversation with other central office administrators and the direction of the conversation included elementary arts education programming in your district, what was the circumstance behind the conversation?*, COA-7 relates their perception of the situation, and provides a strategy for decision-making to sustain a baseline of expected service in the face of competing interests:

And then I could say though, as far as certain funding, like Local Control and Accountability Plan (LCAP), like our supplemental dollars, I am directly involved

in those conversations about budget and considerations for the arts. I think the universal truth behind either of those situations, whether it's indirect or directly involved in the conversation is that there's usually conflict involved. We have state priorities we're trying to meet. So, when we look at like, especially LCAP, there's a requirement or focus for those dollars to be spent on students... that are either associated economically to advantage the English Learners [or] foster youth and homeless youth. So, it's a stretch sometimes to say that arts integration or arts programming is going to directly serve those students when they have other needs that need to be met... That's sort of the conflict. We'd like to support those programs, but we're on a very tight budget. So, a lot of times these decisions kind of get pushed to a foundation or some sort of other grant, a donation funding to support them... and what they want to see happen with those funds and how they want them used to be used, versus how the district sees arts programs or arts integration fitting into our instructional program. It's a balance to be struck. And I think those conversations have to be thorough to make sure everybody feels comfortable and understands the direction of how those funds will be used to support those [arts programs].

Conversing about program sustainability and its funding is not always motivated by the numbers; it can evoke personal feelings from those whose commitment goes deep. Key Finding 3 states: *Administrator decision-making steps are guided by well-intentioned personal bias and only occasionally intentionally guided by state policy or standards, data, instructional practice, or student entitlement.* Some administrators admit to feelings of frustration when working with others in the decision-making process. Administrator question 5 is a question exploring the

feelings of administrators during nuanced dialogue with others during the decision-making process. It asks: *How do you feel when a decision is made, and you don't agree with it?* In frustration, COA-1 rapidly lists the many barriers to elementary arts education, most significantly regarding funding, stating, "When I talk about elementary arts education, the three barriers are time, space, and money." They continue speaking about their feelings, saying, "Well, I actually feel really well. The only [person] I've gotten pissed at is [my financial officer in that they] always perceived me as somebody who's always gonna ask for something, you know?" But COA-1 is clearly frustrated about sustaining arts courses as the program AVID is pulling students of color from their long-standing arts instruction to attend college prep classes, exclaiming, "It's, it's so f---ing... pardon my French."

Prioritizing based upon the evidence of programmatic or student need is likely to reap a generally successful outcome; especially if stakeholders are involved. COA-5 considers the criteria for expenditures as laid out in the district's Local Control and Accountability Plan (LCAP), and considers the nuances in being aware of an equitable distribution of resources:

Well, I think, in our LCAP meeting, we talk a lot about the arts in the sense because we have to allocate money to specific actions and our board has always promoted arts education. So, our band has always been a priority; our music program has been a priority. So, doing that, the prioritization or the meeting, we know that our students, if we want our students to participate in band, we need to be able to buy more instruments because our kids would have to rent and some of our parents don't have the funds to rent the instruments, and then we have a certain

amount of instruments that are limited, so it limits the amount of students that can participate.

COA-7 refers to the fact that not everyone feels comfortable discussing how elementary arts education fits into the instructional scene no matter the funding situation. This is an impediment to them seeing how access to arts education programming can play an integral part in helping students achieve those specific state goals in ELA or math; in fact, it is the indirect approach to some content that can make learning through the arts so successful. All arts coordinators in this study spoke of their extensive fundraising efforts. Indeed, the richness of offerings was due in part to the ability of an arts coordinator or designee to negotiate with outside sources for donations or grants. Occasionally, the district was called to account for its own contribution to the funding base, but it seems that a majority of common core instruction in elementary arts education in this study is funded from outside the school district, something that does not happen whole cloth with other core content.

Quality Instructional Programming Maintains Sustainability

Credentialed Personnel. Participants agree that one of the significant components of a quality, sustainable elementary program would be to provide instruction led by credentialed arts teachers. Having credentialed instructors who meet district and state accountabilities would imply the potential of them delivering standards-based instruction. Five out of twelve study participants mentioned they would like to have credentialed arts teachers delivering that instruction. In response to administrator question 13, *In your ideal world, if you could have anything, what do you think would assist you in developing and implementing elementary arts education programming for your district?*, COA-6 expressed:

I like the model where you have an expert that would be cycling through [the classes] and that goes for all contents, for art, science, you know, the ones that... get specialized teachers, credential teachers to go through. And that is the model that we have for art at the elementary.

But having credentialed arts teachers is not without its doubts at the elementary level, for as multiple subject credentialed teachers, general education teachers are labelled as qualified to teach to the arts standards. This implies they do not necessarily need credentialed arts teachers to teach directed lessons at the elementary level. In response to the focus group question 11, *What do you think needs further examination such that it might assist you, and perhaps others, in your work?*, AEC-2 wonders:

It's just a problem in our district, the whole idea of, and this is an elementary problem, of dedicated art teachers versus the gen ed teachers. When we talk about arts being core, then it really should be core, and then gen ed teachers should be teaching it. If a lot of the art teachers, then are saying... credentialed, dedicated art teachers, are saying well that's not art if it's not being taught by this dedicated art teacher. So, I don't know. I don't know if that is any answer. It just struck me because it's definitely an issue that we're having... and it seems to be that the gen ed teachers really like the [credentialed arts teachers.] We actually just switched our elementary art program. So now it's called art and innovation and its art and maker space together, but so it's not necessarily credentialed art teachers that are teaching it.

Quality Teacher Practice. Ensuring quality instruction requires ensuring the quality of teacher practice. Just because a teacher is credentialed is no insurance that the

instruction will be rigorous, standards-based, or meeting district goals as outlined in the LCAP. As an arts education coordinator, AEC-3 sees teacher evaluation and professional development as key to sustaining a quality program, and a generous portion of their daily tasks.

But there are some expectations [to the job] that are just part of [it].

For example, teacher evaluations; because we do have an elementary program, we evaluate teachers. For example, this last weekend I did a new teacher PD on arts integration. [The Department of Instruction] had a new teacher workshop, and I was pretty happy that they invited us. So, a lot of times it's by invitation. I don't know. And I think there is kind of an expectation that [we] provide PD for teachers when asked.

Arts Providers. There is much instructional interest to be gained when an active professional is sharing their experience and technique. Purchasing the services of artists-in-residence can fill in the gaps in instructional delivery to maintain sustainability. They can provide partial or complete programming of direct instruction when there are no credentialed teachers available, or the district does not want to place the responsibility of instruction in the hands of the general education teacher. Their services can cost less than hiring a union represented, credentialed arts teacher, but one should be cautioned that does not necessarily mean they are delivering standards-based instruction. However, most artists in residence are clear that working with the school district means they are to give reference to the standards, in part because they are often working in concert with generalist classroom teachers to meet the content standards. Administrator question 8 explores how to address programming needs, asking: *Was there a time when you had to prioritize your options and make a decision*

regarding... programming needs? COA-3 speaks about arts provider contributions during the pandemic, creating standards-based lessons and videos for the generalist teachers to show over Zoom. COA-2 expresses the need for adding arts providers, saying, “we've had to rely on a lot of consulted groups and outside organizations to help us with music. Even when we had five [credentialed arts] teachers, we still needed help.”

Having arts providers at the ready helps keep programming up and running when the district has no stable funding for credentialed teachers. Importantly, it can assist a district in maintaining equity in access for students as long as funding is present to pay for these providers. If the district is relying on the success of an arts education coordinator to garner funding for programming and they have no arts education coordinator, they may not have the programming they need to be equitable.

Scheduling Instruction. Most administrators referred to the need to be creative when prioritizing for scheduling arts classes if they are to maintain the sustainability of programs. Time, funding, personnel, and resources all impact when and how instruction is delivered. Sometimes the criteria for certain funding must be scheduled for targeted student populations and this can conflict with other program goals for those students or exclude other students from the instruction. Sometimes, it relegates instruction to after school programming. COA-5 is required to place arts instruction into after school or summer school, reporting:

We partner with an organization... that does our enrichment for our school program and does it also after school. So, one of the enrichments is art. They have people who come out. We do six-week sessions where they do different types of arts during those six weeks, so they do that for our elementary, and they also do it for the [middle] schools in the after-school program.

Although the arts are core content subject matter, it is a challenge to find a place for it during the school day, especially for districts that have not made a foray into Project-Based Learning, STEAM, or Arts Integration. But S. B. USD has an arts coordinator whose job it is to assist school principals in not only their scheduling, but also the facilities used. They state:

So, we're gonna make sure it doesn't happen on music days. For example, principals schedule all their extra things around our elementary music schedule... usually it's the other way around. Usually it's like, oh, we'll fit you in after school. Or you know, when the janitor leaves, you can use this closet. You know, that kind of stuff. But we're saying here's our elementary music schedule and here's not only do we do, we say, here are the needs of that classroom. We need a smart board in there. We need, you know, furniture.

COA-1 finds that sometimes scheduling accountability for equitable access is left up to the decision-making of the students at the secondary level; they imply that this may be representative of the attitude of the district on equity. When faced with creating a course schedule to meet a new state mandate, the effort is not made to help students take the class without losing their arts opportunities. This does not bode well for students who are considering the arts as a pathway to college. COA-1 says, “[What] I've been told by my bosses is sometimes kids just have to make a choice.” COA-1 laments, “You're telling me you want this kid to drop out of something that they've been doing, that they loved, and ties them to all their friends... to do this one class?”

Quality Instruction Encourages Sustainability

Amongst all interviewees and focus group participants, no one referred explicitly to funding with the purpose of ensuring instruction; as a strategic, intentional goal in elementary

arts education as it relates to program sustainability, student access or achievement, or as a value claim about its place in curriculum. In all fairness, no interview questions specifically asked how administrators ensure quality instruction. It can be assumed that providing quality instruction is the primary function of an educator, especially as this is something referred to in ESSA, so long as we all agree what quality instruction is. Data analysis revealed that purposeful language about planning and providing for quality instruction was not really in use by administrators when speaking or deciding about elementary arts instruction, resulting in the Key Finding 2 that says, *Three of fifteen participants spoke of their existing elementary arts education programming using instructional terminology, explicitly when referring to the right to access or the quality of instruction.* Participant responses did, however, touch on important topics that contribute to quality such as having credentialed teachers, standards-based lesson plans, or attending to a student's social-emotional needs by providing extra-curricular experiences that add enrichment to a student's artistic, academic, and personal life. COA-5 refers to evidence of quality of instruction that enriches a student's academic life and develops them culturally, saying:

I was thinking about how to make the summer school more enriching. I knew about [a visual arts curriculum] because one of our former teachers used to do it... We are looking at what's important. So, for example... in the afterschool program, I know that the students need to learn more about different artists... and we know that will help develop their brain as well as develop them culturally. I made sure that when I was picking the different artists, I picked multicultural artists... African American, Indigenous... one from Mexico. It will also help them... have fun and have that project-based or hands-on activity, because that's

what's important to us... that project-based learning because we know that's the way they learn best.

Quality instruction is informed by Common Core Standards in the Arts, the California Arts Education Framework, and California Education Code. As administrators spoke about the quality of instruction to support sustainability, they often referred to the programming, policy, or funding, but not necessarily to the expectations of instruction, as evidenced by their use of language to define their perspective. This contributed to Key Finding 2.

All members of the arts coordinators' focus group were aware of the California Education Code, Arts Education Framework, or the standards, while two of the seven administrators interviewed indicated having accessed or read them. Focus group participants were asked focus group-question 6, *What significant program structures do you think lead to an increase in student access to elementary arts education?* (For example, district behaviors, administrator commitments, etc.). AEC-1 stated simply, "Well, it's a part of the ed code."

Administrators were asked administrator question 9: *How do you feel when you are engaging in an instructional conversation with other content administrators about elementary arts education?* It was anticipated participants would express any feelings about teaching and learning in the arts using the language of the pedagogy. Participants were not explicitly asked about their use of their language as it was not anticipated to be an absent practice. The three participants interviewed from districts with a strategic plan in place or currently in development used some instructional language or terminology indicative of the common core standards in the arts when referring to existing program implementation whereas those with no district plan did not. Where it was used, it was in reference to program need, while none was used when referring to quality of instruction or the right of access. It is important to note that the questions were

designed to refer to arts education using the parlance of curriculum and instruction in hopes of eliciting participant responses on instructional decision-making. Key Finding 2 reveals a lack of instructional terminology in use on the part of decision-makers as the data indicates most participant language was spoken in relationship to funding, scheduling, or distribution of other resources as opposed to an instructional imperative.

Two administrators, COA-1 and COA-2 mentioned the instructional goal of students accomplishing skills from the music standards. COA-2 responded to this question with a story about how it was the parents that necessitated their reading of the California Education Code, standards, and Arts Education Framework, before they could answer their questions about making partial cuts to music programs. The situation was very difficult as funding was being restructured and the community was fighting against potential cuts. Administrative participants were asked administrator question 8, *Was there a time when you had to prioritize your options and make a decision regarding elementary arts education in your district but perhaps you felt you didn't fully understand either the policy, the pedagogy of the content, or the programming needs? How did you get the information to guide your decision making?* In response to administrator question 8, COA-2 stated:

One of the things that the parents really loved [was] our program before we cut it. [They] pushed back... they felt like we needed to assess. These were the two things that came up. They felt like we needed to assess whether students could read music and they felt like we needed to have a certain amount of instructional minutes daily. Right. And they said, you know, it's in the framework, it's in the content standards. Well, yes and no. I mean, really the only thing that has minutes is P. E. [Physical Education]

Taking the time to read the education code and expectations as laid out in the Arts Education Framework informed COA-2 that it is not actually mandated content but merely recommendation for what is ideal. While the district desires to do what's best for students, knowledge that arts instruction (and even math!) is not mandatory gives leeway for cutting, should the need arise. In a follow-up to administrator question 8, and addressing parent demands about content standards in music, the researcher asked COA-2, "So, you read the standards, you read the framework, you looked at the ed code? You were aware of the policy? You knew what was required and what was not? You knew what was recommended?" They answer was, "Yes." In response to administrator question 8, COA-1 referred to the fact that high school students look forward to studying music in college and they try to provide appropriate coaches for those high school students, especially those coming from a minoritized background.

COA-5, an administrator in a district with no strategic plan or policy, is aware of the value of arts education; that to be sustainable, instruction should be of quality. COA-5 asserts that it is important for students' cognitive development, and it's their understanding that it impacts all other learning. They are committed to providing whatever they can, but when referring to quality instruction, they don't speak of the instruction relative to students meeting content standards. They imply an understanding that having credentialed teachers may ensure quality, and actively reach out to a resource person for assistance to make sure students are getting what they should have. In response to administrator question 8, COA-5 additionally stated:

When I was looking at what to implement, I was learning about it [robotics coding], and I had to reach out, of course, to somebody who knows about coding to tell me, how is that going to be beneficial? How is that going to be supportive? So, they gave me literature and they gave me a PowerPoint... We have band

teachers, they're credential music teachers, that's what they do. So, the other art pieces, they're not credentialed.

COA-3, an administrator in a district currently considering a strategic plan in the arts, was very animated describing a quality project at one of the magnet schools in their district wherein artists-in-residence created standards-based lessons to be used during the pandemic and to be continued in delivery beyond the pandemic, saying:

There's four resident artists... they're kind of our resident experts, if you will. The grant that we wrote was to take their expertise and have them create videos... kind of really looking at the arts standards and having them develop some lessons in the critical priority standards in the arts and develop some video lessons that would also include some materials that any classroom teacher could just pick up and say, okay, what's the point of this lesson?

Also creating standards-based curriculum is COA-1 who is in a district with a strategic plan, and implied that having standards-based curriculum increases student access, saying:

So... what structures are there? I mean, we wrote our arts curriculum, and we need to update that because we wrote it to the former standards... It was posted online to the new standards, but we're offering professional development in the new standards, and culturally relevant curriculum and so on.

Arts coordinator AEC-3 draws a distinction in the use of language when administrators are speaking about policy as opposed to instruction, saying:

I will say that in terms of our [office]of instruction that the arts do have a place at the table, and that I think... I'm going to make a statement that I think that could vary; it may have something to do with the person who's in the position of the

director who has found a place at the table. So, there is conversation about... and a lot of it, I would say at that level, is not so much about instruction but about policy and about the other things that are happening, mandates coming down from the board are coming from the superintendent.

Participants' feelings are sometimes wrapped up in how they look at instruction and how they sense children are responding to elementary arts instruction. They also may be uncomfortable with their *own* feelings about the arts. But COA-5 is passionate about providing arts experiences for students, and the language expresses itself emotionally:

I love, like I said, I'm so passionate about the arts in elementary, because the kids they need to learn how to sing, how to do plays. I was a kindergarten teacher, so we did a lot of that and so we would always do a performance. We did a performance in the winter, and then we did another one in the spring. Sometimes you may have administrators who are not so keen into the arts and trying not to be emotional, but just bringing in the research that says this... what we know will really help students grow. Art also helps the students be more creative, so when they're going to write, they need to develop that creative piece. So, I think we're a little fortunate in our district because that's just something that's always been important to all of us, is that art piece.

So, it's programmatic sometimes versus--this is my sense--versus purely instructional because there's so much else going on that sometimes those deep instructional conversations don't happen at that level. I do know that just in our offices over the years, there have been opportunities that are kind of...catch as catch can, right? Where you're able to talk about integrated ideas or bounce ideas

off each other. I know when common core came out, every Monday morning, every single person who had anything to do with teachers got together and we talked... It is about ultimately the students and instruction, and I think a frustration I sometimes have is that the instructional part of it gets left until the end.

COA-2 expresses strong feelings about having to cut programming because they know it reduces student access and building programming is difficult. They sorrowfully but confidently state:

[I] felt terrible. Cutting always feels terrible, you know, but I also feel like it's, it's waves, you know, as long as you don't get rid of something, you know, if, if you just, if you pull it out and it's gone, it's really hard to bring back. Yeah. But if you just pare down and then you can expand in good times and then you know that we can survive. So, no, I didn't feel great about it, but at least I felt like we had done our best in making sure that it existed.

AEC- 5 misses the old days when administration conversed about instruction, saying:

We used to have weekly instructional leadership meetings, and it was a great opportunity to hear and learn about what other people were doing so that we could cross-pollinate and support each other and just even understand the new things that were coming down the pike. It was an opportunity for us to ask questions and really understand at least at some level what was happening in other areas of instruction. We haven't had that in five years, six years, and some of us make a point of having lunch together. Those of us that don't get to decide if there's a meeting or not, just because we miss it and we miss the impact of it.

We have a cabinet which is all the directors and assistant supes and the superintendents. They meet weekly. I assume they're talking about instruction. Most of the time I don't find out what they're talking or deciding until I've done something wrong. Then they say, "Oh no. We decided that last year." Like okay, nice to know. Yeah. Yeah, it's kind of sad right now. It is.

In response to focus group-question 11, *What do you think needs further examination such that it might assist you, and perhaps others, in your work?*, the focus group discussed how difficult it is when conversing with other central office administrators about the arts being core content. Implicit in understanding that the arts are designated core content is that they have Common Core standards attached to the curriculum. AEC-1 laments that it requires professional development to get credentialed arts teachers and the elementary generalist teachers up to speed on the standards. They share this story about the greatest challenge to improving instruction:

PD. My secondary teachers, we were able to get them to professional development when the new standards came in. So, it's getting them up-to-date, and we work with LA County to get all our subject matter teachers up-to-date on the standards. It's the elementary teachers we feel like we really need to home in on because that's what's going to start [a child's education in the arts]. Our programs lost the high school and intermediate because of COVID, but if we bring the interest of the elementary maybe we could spark something in the kids so when they get to the intermediate that they're looking for it.

The arts coordinators interviewed in the focus group expressed frustration in their conversation, implying that if other administrators only understood the arts have standards

attached to them it would assist them in their job maintaining the sustainability of elementary arts education in the schools. They groused:

Participant AEC-2

And I would like to know what does it mean the arts as core? What is that in practice?

Participant AEC-5

Okay, wait. I can answer that. I can answer that. If you don't have enough money to have dedicated teachers, the arts are core, so that you don't have to pay for a specialist. You can just put that expectation on your generalist.

Participant AEC-2

But if you don't put the minutes to it, how is it core? It's like if you're not going to say there are so many PE minutes that need to happen, what makes it core? Just as somebody in practice trying to help other people, I don't know.

Participant AEC-5

Well, I can't tell you how many conversations in my office happen where they say, "Yeah, but we're only looking at the core subjects." I go, "Uh, the arts are supposed to be core." "Oh well you know what I mean."

Participant AEC-2

Exactly.

Participant AEC-5

No, I don't. [Said in reference to another central office administrator saying, "Oh well, you know what I mean."]

Participant AEC-3

We have standards. We have standards. Yeah...I think that's the \$64,000 question.

Critical Race Theory (Educational Equity)

In this study, critical race theory (CRT) provides a reflective lens through which to explore how systems of injustice in education limit administrative decision-making, affecting student access to a well-rounded education including elementary arts education. The data demonstrates that concern for student access is on the margin of expectation. Administrative

perspective on equity is guided by what administrators think is best for students. It is a perspective that is, while well-intentioned, largely based on administrator personal bias as opposed to a set of instructional criteria vetted to meet implementation of the standards or that is pedagogically designed to address the educational subordination faced by minoritized students.

Table 5, “Critical Race Theory and Emerging Themes,” lists the broader domains of emerging themes and demonstrates the most frequently referred to or alluded to themes that best align to topics concerned with critical race theory. Additionally, it reveals prominent themes from the literature review which were left unrecognized during the administrative interviews and the Focus Group.

Table 5

Critical Race Theory and Emerging Themes

| Explicitly Referred to or Implied | CRITICAL RACE THEORY | | | | | | | | | | | |
|---------------------------------------|---|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|--|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| | Central Office Administrators (Interviews) | | | | | | | Arts Education Coordinators (Focus group) | | | | |
| | COA-1 | COA-2 | COA-3 | COA-4 | COA-5 | COA-6 | COA-7 | AEC-1 | AEC-2 | AEC-3 | AEC-4 | AEC-5 |
| | Access | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Assessing Access (Use of Data) | X | | X | X | X | X | X | X | | X | | X |
| Baseline of Service | | X | | | X | X | X | | X | X | | X |
| Best for Students | X | X | X | | X | X | X | X | X | | X | X |
| Equity- Admin Perspective | X | X | | | X | X | X | | | X | | X |
| Deficit Model Thinking | X | | | X | X | | X | | | X | | |
| Electives Supplanted With ELD classes | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | | | X | | |
| | Authority to Decide | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Policy and Politics | X | X | X | X | | | X | X | X | X | | X |
| Strategic Plan Guides/Protects Access | X | X | | | | | X | X | X | X | | X |
| | Innovative Instruction | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Instruction is Quality | | X | X | | X | | | X | | X | | X |
| Innovation | | X | | X | X | | X | | X | X | | |

Date created: 2022

As previously stated, the many nodes identified from participant feedback were comparatively analyzed to group, or “lump,” the nodes into broader categories to draw connections more easily between participant experiences.

The key findings addressed under critical race theory are as follows:

Key Finding 1: *Arts Education Coordinators (AEC) influence student access to elementary arts education.*

Key Finding 3: *Administrator decision-making steps are guided by well-intentioned personal bias yet only occasionally intentionally guided by state policy or standards, data, instructional practice, or student entitlement.*

Key Finding 6: *All study participants claim they want to do what is best for students, but only three of twelve explicitly spoke of equity in their decision-making.*

Strategic Plan

The document review revealed two out of four districts have a strategic plan or Board Policy in place with one district in the process of creating a plan, but those plans lay out goals for implementation; they do not define what access looks like for all students so that it can be measured, nor do they provide guidance for the direct pedagogical tactics needed to achieve equity for all students within the classroom. This does not, however, mean that districts are not purposefully considering student access. In fact, having a district strategic plan is what guides arts coordinators on program implementation.

In AEC-1's district, now that they have a strategic plan in place, they are "moving towards having program specialists per department." With a plan in place, the district began to match the grant funding provided by an external granting organization. Focus group participants were asked focus group-question 2, *What expectations does your district have of your role in instruction?*—and the follow-up question—*How are those expectations communicated?* AEC-2 looks to the strategic plan for what to do next, saying:

We have a strategic arts plan, and I oversee the implementation. We're wrapping up this rendition of it. We're on our second version of it, actually third version of it, and I'm hoping that I get to revise it a fourth time with the community. My school board has included arts goals for the last several years. So that directs it, but most... let's see... I'd say about 60% of what I'm doing is what teachers and admin and I come up with that needs to be done next. That's the norm. Since COVID, it's been a lot. During COVID, a lot of it was transitioning and making sure all the teachers were trained and comfortable and had what they needed.

Access

Key Finding 1 states, *Arts Education Coordinators (AEC) influence student access to elementary arts education*, clearly demonstrating that there are consequences for competency in decision-making. And yet, there was ambiguous administrator feedback regarding administrator question 3, which asks, *How do central office administrators and arts education coordinators/designees perceive the arts learning experiences of racially and economically minoritized elementary students?* One out of seven administrative participants interviewed referred to the potential accountability that access could be measured in the number of minutes that might be required. COA-2 points out that “really the only thing that has minutes is P. E. (Physical Education),” a requirement in the California Education Code. Participant responses were thoughtful, honestly identifying how student access and success were measured or monitored, but most responses were subjective and lacking in instructional criteria. Key Finding 3 states that *Administrator decision-making steps are guided by well-intentioned personal bias yet only occasionally intentionally guided by state policy or standards, data, instructional*

practice, or student entitlement, and recognizes that administrators utilize unpredictable methods of measurement to make their decisions, seemingly clutching for any assistance as they strive to maintain and even increase student access.

Assessing the Access, Equity, and Quality of Instruction

The issue and understanding of the quality of instruction as an indicator of equity is varied amongst those interviewed, imbued by perspectives of administrator bias, training, and personal experience. Administrators can demonstrate valuing instructional content in many ways. One way is by measuring student access to instruction but also by assessing the quality of that instruction and subsequent student achievement of the curriculum. Kisida and Bowen (2019) say “as policymakers begin to collect and value outcome measures beyond test scores, we are likely to further recognize the value of the arts in the fundamental mission of education (Para. 11).

Keeping Data on Access. To explore differing views on how districts are assessing student access to elementary arts instruction, administrator participants were asked administrator question 10, *Can you please describe how your district measures student access to and proficiency in elementary arts education classes?* Focus Group participants were asked focus group question 7, *Does your district keep data on access to arts programming and disaggregate by student populations?*—and the follow-up questions—*How do you measure student access to programming?*--and--*Does your district keep data on access to arts programming and disaggregate by student populations?* Overall, districts are attempting to keep some form of data on student access, but it is not a predictable practice, especially in a district that has no operating strategic plan or policy that requires accountability. In response to administrator question 10, COA-3 lamented:

You ask the question of how do we evaluate everybody's doing it? I guess I'm kind of stuck on that. We don't because it's not part of their lesson plan. Right? So, if it was part of the lesson, they'd be more likely to follow it. I don't think as far as the report card, I don't think there's...arts.

I don't believe it has [been assessed] yet. I think that, you know, to be honest, art has always been the layer on top of the cherry on the cake but has never been really a part of the measurement... unless if you count the one time a year that you're gonna bring art samples and put it up in the boardroom. That is something that we do. And we do have gallery walks, which a lot of schools will do, but it's usually the [PTA] reflections program or things that... but it's never been something by design.

It is unpredictable because administrators may be unfamiliar with the tools for measurement. COA-5 is aware of secondary assessment, but not so much at the elementary level, saying:

On the elementary level, I would be guessing here because I don't know what type of monitoring tools or assessments they may use. We could measure access. Yes, we don't consistently measure access, but under the curriculum and instruction umbrella, I could measure access to the [secondary] courses in terms of the demographics. Who has access to those courses, the enrollment numbers? We could look across a three-year span or five-year span and see, you know, which students are gaining access to those courses.

But in districts where a strategic plan or Board of Education policy is present, administrators are regularly required to make report back. COA-1 states, "Documented? Oh

yeah. We do a tracking of all arts enrollment every year. We compare year to year, and we say it's gotten better here. We remind the board every year in our yearly report.” In response to focus group question 7, AEC-1, an arts coordinator, refers to their relationship with a county organization that assists districts in creating and maintaining a strategic plan, and points to data collection as part of the plan, saying, “We're trying to keep data. I'm working with [the] County [on our] profile. I have to look at what we have as far as access to the different schools. We're trying to create some kind of process that we have data to help support us.”

Data demonstrating student access can reveal unspoken eligibility requirements for access. AEC-3 reports that:

We just have data because we're in charge of elementary arts teachers. So, we have probably too much data... I don't know how it's been really used... so looking at what, in terms of equity, who's getting [arts]... and our teachers, are put into the schools based on enrollment at the schools.

Participant COA-1 is also regularly engaging in data collection, and now that the district has a strategic plan and is applying its own funding to the programming K12, they are improving on the process. They state:

We're trying to figure out how to do that because right now we're just implementing support, access for kids and teachers, the PDs, offering conferences to our music teachers, so it's just a little bit here, a little bit there. I was given lots of money and I was able to purchase instruments for all our music teachers, and music chairs, music stands, music books, instruments... I'm trying to create something to show what we're doing, just help support our program. So, every time we have something I'm taking pictures. So, my assistant supe did present

when we received music instruments. [They] would send me the pictures because [they] presented it to board, to the cabinet, showing, "This is where some of our money's going, and this is what it looks like."

Deficit Thinking Regarding Access

Key Finding 6 states that *All study participants claim they want to do what is best for students, but only three of twelve explicitly spoke of equity in their decision-making*, and yet sometimes administrators will make a decision they truly think is in the best interest of students, but it arises from a deficit model of thinking about instruction. Administrators were asked administrator question 11, *Does your district supplant elective classes with English language development (ELD) classes until students reclassify out of ELD?* COA-2 is aware that students receive limited access to arts instruction when they are restricted, due to their need to reclassify from being English Learners to Standard English Learners, reporting that at the secondary level, adding a zero or seventh period to the daily schedule “has led to an increase in participation of students... for our subgroup students, our population, [and] special populations.” They also note that improving orchestra programming at the middle school level improves their high school programming as “that’s the pathway to high school.”

All participants in this study demonstrated they possessed a core value as a leader to do what is right for students and their willingness to make hard decisions that hold true to a bottom line, of sorts. Sometimes such motivated yet rigid commitment may unintentionally play into old habits of institutional racism when one student right is sacrificed for another. Ignorance of student rights or recommended policies is no excuse for poorly nuanced decision-making in a leader. Creating opportunities for minorities can

in turn create new barriers, especially in implementing K12 arts education; for instance, creating a scenario of reduced access. COA-1 grouses:

The rich, well-to-do parents know how to get around these barriers. [Their children] are the ones that go on and get into symphony and go on to college and get, you know, the valedictorian. I've said, so why are we taking kids [out]... [Do] you know what AVID [Advancement Via Individual Determination] is? You want to go to college? Yeah. We want you to go to college. Every kid in our fourth and fifth grade must play an instrument or sing in a choir. So, when they get to middle school, they say, "what elective would you like?" But they see the African American kids and they say, "[we] really think you'd be better in AVID because we want you to go to college. Don't you want to go to college?" Then they come to us and go, "why don't you have more African American and Latino kids in your orchestras and bands because...?" [It's because] you took 'em out of our classes to put 'em in AVID because they're a kid of color!

Combining a misunderstanding about arts instruction with a deficit manner of thinking about students of color is decision-making that is instructionally counter-productive.

Instructional Creativity and Innovation to Increase Access

Most participants referred to creativity and innovation not as instructional goals, but rather as strategies to increase equity in access to arts education for students. Key Finding 6 implies that decision-makers will seek multiple solutions to build better programming for students, even grouping like-minded instructional initiatives together in hopes of developing something that makes instructional sense. Questions about creativity

and innovation in instruction were not explicitly asked of the participants, and yet participants proffered the concepts as programmatic strategies to address limited instructional time and scheduling issues. The initiatives of arts integration, Career Technical Education (CTE) at the secondary level, and STEAM curriculum were the top contenders for such program structures as all three depend upon combining content areas to maximize instructional time.

Arts Integration. Although arts integration may still be a relatively misunderstood topic, administrators are seeing it as a positive development in relationship to elementary education, to achieve program sustainability, and to implement pedagogies of equity in the classroom due to its general nature of respect for student thought. COA-3 describes their understanding of it, saying:

I know that it's usually subject-integrated. I've seen it integrated into social studies, literature themes for holidays. You know, everybody did their Abraham Lincoln plate with, you know, the cotton balls... it's integration. It's no longer like, we're looking at writing, for example. We're looking at writing across the curriculum. I think art is in the same vein. That it doesn't have to be, "we're gonna stop everything right now and do our art lesson." I think it's really about tying it to content and making it so that it is bringing value to our students.

COA-3's colleague, COA-4, admits limited knowledge of arts integration, but grasps the basic concept that the arts are sort of a super-connector between content areas, stating:

So, that's a concept that I've only recently become familiar with. But yes, that makes a lot of sense with the grant that we're implementing... because the resident artists are developing general lessons. It's not really practical for them to do an

integration into different subject areas. So, they're sort of doing general lessons and that would be kind of up to the classroom teacher to figure out, does this connect with a topic that we're teaching where we can kind of tie that together, as an integration piece.

I would say if it's integrated directly into our subject core content, if it's part of that, our teachers are more likely to ensure that it happens. I think if we layer it on, it's less likely to happen.

Participant AEC-3 refers to the fact that what some people think is arts integration is not necessarily what people trained in those strategies would agree with. Participant AEC-3 strategized that if a district wants arts integration, then people need professional development on it, asserting:

Well, I think of one thing--and this is the only thing that I can actually hang anything on--was back in 2012 when everybody was talking about arts integration, but it was being, what's the word, appropriated by non-arts people. I kind of said, pardon me but hell no. If you're going to do arts integration, let's get serious. So, I said we're going to do a... class, and we're going to let them know what real arts integration should look like.

Participant AEC-1 works with general education teachers on arts integration in consort with an arts provider:

For the gen ed elementary teachers they attend four PDs. They listen to and follow instruction, and if you know [the arts provider], if you've ever participated, it's a hands-on participation process where they're not just listening and taking notes, but they're going to create their own notes by doing.

They describe the process saying, “what we do with that, is, teachers create lessons and integrate the arts into the programs. They show artwork and lessons at the end of the PD.”

Career Technical Education (CTE). Five out of twelve participants refer to managing their district’s secondary Career Technical Education program (CTE) as a significant program in their district. COA-6 manages their district’s CTE program and envisions the day when the elementary programming is sufficient to prepare students to enter the CTE program, saying, “You know, I gotta go in phases. To clean up the high school CTE programs and then go into the middle school and they're all in phase. And then eventually yes, we will get to the elementary.” Decision-making for the arts at secondary focuses on it as a requirement for high school graduation and college entrance, not simply as an obligatory part of a well-rounded education.

STEAM. STEAM is a flexible architecture for curriculum delivery that can assist a district in providing a well-rounded education to all students by virtue of its multi-content structure. It invites cross-curricular conversation between content specialists and, due to its purposeful focus on developing learner agency, provides the opportunity for teachers to create a more equitable classroom. The focus group participants responded to focus group question 13 that asks, *In your ideal world, if you could have anything, what do you think would assist you in developing and implementing elementary arts education programming for your district?* AEC-1 meets regularly with a teacher on special assignment (TOSA) to “reach out to others...like science.” They also meet in a committee working with grants to integrate the arts but reach out to the science department to “create some kind of collaboration.” COA-5 wishes for greater STEAM instruction because it includes the arts. COA-5 dreams:

If I had all the money in the world, then that's what I would do because I know we need to implement STEAM. STEAM has that art in there. So, I know there's work

to do and I know [from] research the kids need all that to be able to be really a whole person.

Perceptions of Equity

The arts coordinators who participated in the focus group expressed that having credentialed teachers increases equity in access to quality instruction for all students. They discussed that quality teachers are an issue of equity, saying:

Participant AEC-3:

Yeah. I think it's there on everybody's tongue, and I think people are watching it, but I think the barriers are bodies and dollars. You know, when you talk about equity, it's like sometimes I feel like we... I don't know. Yeah, those are the barriers. We just can't find enough [credentialed] people.

Participant AEC-2:

Me too. Me too. [They're going] to districts that pay more.

Participant AEC-3:

And it's just like, but we need you [university students in a credential program]. The kids need you, and I know right now we just got dance and theater credentials reinstated, and we have our first group of [university students] going through a prep program in Cal State, East Bay, right? And the-

Participant AEC-5:

The only school that gives it.

Participant AEC-3:

You know what? They still have to take the CSET. Nobody is doing a waiver program. No one wants to jump through those hoops. So we're going to start seeing [university students], right? So, it's like first of all, we need to have places for them, and that's my worry in terms of the kids need them, but are the districts going to-

Participant AEC-5:

Going to hire them?

Descriptive Behavioral Decision Theory

In this study, descriptive behavioral decision theory provides a reflective lens through which to explore practices in administrative decision-making that impacts implementation of elementary arts education (see Table 6).

Table 6

Descriptive Behavioral Decision Theory and Emerging Themes

| THEME | Descriptive Behavioral Decision Theory | | | | | | | | | | | |
|--|--|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|---|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| | Central Office Administrators (interviews) | | | | | | | Arts Education Coordinators (focus group) | | | | |
| | COA-1 | COA-2 | COA-3 | COA-4 | COA-5 | COA-6 | COA-7 | AEC-1 | AEC-2 | AEC-3 | AEC-4 | AEC-5 |
| | Framing the Decision-making Problem | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Contribution to Instructional Conversation | | x | x | x | | | | x | x | x | x | x |
| Data Driven Decision-making | x | | | | | | x | | | | | |
| Framing the Decision Making Problem | x | x | x | | | | | x | x | x | x | x |
| Present to BOE Community | | | | | | | | x | x | x | x | x |
| Standards-Based, Arts as Core | x | x | | | | | x | | | | | |
| | Group Decision-making | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Develops Relationships for Support | x | | | | | | x | x | x | x | x | x |
| Develop Parent relationships | x | x | | | | | | x | x | x | x | x |
| Group Decision-making: Negotiation, teamwork, Disagreement resolution | x | x | x | x | x | x | | | | | | |
| Listens to Stakeholders | x | x | x | x | | x | | x | x | x | x | x |
| | Knowledge to Decide | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Knowledge to Decide - Training, Personal Experience, Use of Resource Persons | x | x | x | x | x | x | | x | x | x | x | x |
| | Perceptions of Leadership | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Expectations | x | | | | | | | x | x | x | x | x |
| Funding - decision-making, central office | x | x | x | x | x | x | x | | | | | |
| Perception of Impact from Their Work | x | x | | | x | x | | x | x | x | x | x |
| Supported by other Admins | x | | | | x | | | x | x | x | x | x |
| Used as a | x | | | | | | | x | x | x | x | x |
| | Prioritizing Decision-making | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Authority to Decide: Permissions, Reports to Supervisors | | | | | | | | x | x | x | x | x |
| Controversial Decision | x | x | x | | x | x | x | | | x | | x |
| Clear Steps in Decision-making | x | x | x | | | | | | | | | |
| Fear in Decision Making | x | x | | | | | | | | x | | x |

Date created: 2022

The data demonstrates that administrative perspective on decision-making is largely guided by administrator personal behaviors and biases in relationship to that of others within a group decision-making scenario. Table 6 lists the emerging themes and demonstrates the most frequently referred to or alluded to themes that best align to topics concerned with descriptive

behavioral decision theory. Additionally, it reveals prominent themes from the literature review which were left unrecognized during the administrative interviews and the Focus Group.

The key findings drawn from examination of the data are as follows:

Key Finding 3: *Administrator decision-making steps are guided by well-intentioned personal bias and only occasionally intentionally guided by state policy or standards, data, instructional practice, or student entitlement.*

Key Finding 4: *Most decision-making about elementary arts education is done by group consensus.*

Key Finding 6: *All study participants claim they want to do what is best for students, but only three of twelve explicitly spoke of equity in their decision-making.*

Key Finding 7: *Arts Education Coordinators (AEC) are aware of their own influence on arts programming and face potential challenges from other administrators.*

Perceptions of Leadership

Arts Coordinator Perception of Their Influence on Elementary Arts Education

All Arts Coordinators express passion about their work as leaders advocating for equitable access to elementary arts education. They pride themselves on making a difference not only for students, but for improving teacher practice for generalist and specialist teachers alike.

AEC-1 proudly reports:

At the elementary [level], [the arts integration] process was my idea to bring that in, and to oversee it, and to follow it and to have teachers create slideshows of what they learned and presented. So, we have a documentation of that. The feedback has been very positive by the elementary teachers, but it's hitting those kids that they're like, "Wow, that one ..." always that one kid, was actually

working where the class was really quiet because [they were] so focused. So, [the teachers] they're excited about the art and how they're integrating. The teachers are getting more creative as well... they come back and they're already showing us the next visit. It's like, "Look what my kids did." They're all excited about what the kids are doing. So that, in itself, is that's why [I'm] doing it.

Support for Role in Decision-making

Most administrators and arts coordinators feel support from their superiors for their work, but occasionally feel misunderstood for the position they have to take when advocating for elementary arts as the nuances of that content are often lost on those with limited background. COA-1 had to explain to a colleague why they were having to push for a certain thing, saying “[It’s] my job to advocate for the arts to keep the arts strong in our district.” They added, “And yeah, sometimes I’m not gonna be popular with that.”

Feeling supported by one’s supervisors can depend upon whether or not an employee is clear on the goals and well-organized and self-driven. Focus group participants were asked focus group question 2—*What expectations does your district have of your role in instruction?*—and the follow-up question—*How are those expectations communicated?* The work of participant AEC- 2 is driven by the goals of their district’s strategic plan, the grants they manage, and the needs of others. They say:

I guess I mostly work with... I work with all of the admin and all of the teachers, and we're small but mighty. The school board actually is very involved here. I know all the school board members and that superintendent I meet with once a month. So yeah. I mean I don't know that anyone is saying, “Do this,” but they're telling me what is of interest to them. And a lot of my work plan is based on a

calendar, right? So just on what needs to be done is it's with--whether it's grant writing, performances, and such--but it's very calendar-driven.

Whereas COA-1 and AEC-2 are somewhat seasoned administrators, participant AEC-1 is somewhat new in the role and steadily building new relationships at every level. Participant AEC-1 outlined their process, saying:

I work very closely with all the departments, with the county, with logistics and procurement. I physically get up, walk over there, and talk to the people. It's really how to streamline the department, to track things. Because when I first came in, I thought, "Okay, I ordered it, but it didn't make it. Why?" I didn't know why.

Now I have people on my phone, all the custodians, I know them when I go in. I greet them. The secretaries, I include them, so learning to network and communicate with everybody has helped me run this program a lot easier, and being human with people, and having that support from my director. I was going in and saying, "This is what I'm doing. This is what I'm working on." Or I'm walking into my assistant supe, who's in charge of our department, [and say] "Hey, do you have a second? This is what I'm working on, can I have your opinion? This is what I think. Can I do this? Is this possible?" and "Yes or no?" Usually it's a yes. "Okay, figure it out. Show me what you have, propose it, and we'll see what we can do." I'm like, "Okay." So that has really helped too--has really helped too--to just go in and making yourself, "I'm here. This is what I have. These are my ideas. Can we do it?"

Having support from others can be a mixed blessing, especially when it's competing departments or decision-making groups, which usually have more than one member to respond to. The focus group engaged in a short but lively conversation about the pressure of having to be responsive to multiple stakeholder groups:

AEC- 3

I just wanted to add onto that, is the idea, too, that AEC-2 mentioned--the board, and I know I think, too--I feel like there's a lot that, not just from the [office] of instruction and the chief academic officer, but from the board and from the superintendent. So, there's a lot of trickle-down that falls onto our plate from those entities as well.

AEC-5

And partners. Sometimes partners, too, because some of our partnerships, they want to do things and you try to accommodate-

AEC-2

One other thing that's been very new for me--I actually was talking to AEC-5 about a year ago about--it is that the teachers' union has gotten very in my face, which I've been doing this work in some fashion for 10 years. Not in my current position, but yeah.

AEC-5

Yes. Very much.

Decision-making as a Negotiated Group Effort

The most significant category under descriptive behavioral decision theory revealed by the data is Key Finding 4, *Most decision-making about elementary arts education is done by group consensus*. It was referred to by all administrator and focus group participants. In response to AI-Q4--*What steps do you take when making a decision?*--and the follow-up question--*What do you do when you don't know everything you need to know [about arts education] when making a decision?*--COA-2 outlines their team's process:

We have our leadership team here, the district instructional team, which includes our superintendent and our assistant supe of HR [Human Resources]. All of us

were [here] because [the superintendent] has to negotiate, right? Everything that we decide. But I think what was great is we all had kind of been thinking about it independently and came with some ideas and we threw it all up on the whiteboard and, you know, discussed the pros and cons. All of us were comfortable enough. Like, we didn't have so much ownership that we couldn't see our work, you know, broken apart and put back together in different ways because we knew that what we were doing, what's a big lift. Yeah, right? And so we needed everybody's eyes and everybody's input and everybody's different ideas on how to make it work best. I love those because we have a really good team and our superintendent has created the environment to make that happen where, you know, we're not all trying to make [the superintendent's] idea work or be the best one or any of that kind of weird stuff. It's more about let's create the best program and [the superintendent's] a good problem-solver, too.

COA-4 states, "I don't have expertise in a lot of the areas that we provide professional development for. I definitely rely on my team of experts to help guide our priorities... it's very much a collaborative system." COA-3 relies on their instructional team for guidance as COA-3 is somewhat uncomfortable with their lack of knowledge in some content areas, saying:

I have my department, I really run it as a very collaborative group. I don't have an expertise in a lot of the areas that we, you know, provide professional development for. So, I definitely rely on my team of experts to help guide our priorities and the directions, the training we provide, the kind of the direction we take, the way we approach things. It's very much a, what's the word, um,

collaborative system. And if I don't know, then I ask someone on my team who probably does know, or we go to LACO or, you know, find the experts.

A major benefit of group decision-making is that an administrator has many perspectives to draw upon. Administrator question 8 asks: *Was there a time when you had to prioritize your options and make a decision regarding elementary arts education in your district but perhaps you felt you didn't fully understand either the policy, the pedagogy of the content, or the programming needs? How did you get the information to guide your decision making?*

Administrators spoke about what they do when they recognize they do not have enough knowledge about arts instruction; the good news is that if they lack fundamental knowledge of arts content, they want to get the information. Reliance upon their instructional team is very important; however, they do not speak about the need for their team to possess accurate knowledge. Their decision-making is more akin to consensus building to a point as opposed to leveraging a potential decision against evidence or guidelines. COA-6 takes advantage of this, relating:

Oh, so usually if I'm making a decision on something, I don't know. I love to research. I love to go ask people who do have that information. And I'm never afraid to ask questions. So, I like to approach things as a team. I love to bounce ideas off people and say, "Hey, you know, like, do you know more about this? Let me know what you think" ... I really like the teamwork approach... if I'm accomplishing a task and I don't have all the answers.

Group Decision-making with Stakeholders

Listening to all stakeholders is a complimentary administrative practice that aligns with the idea of group decision-making on the part of the central office staff. Key Finding 4 says:

Most decision-making about elementary arts education is done by group consensus. This would include parental input. COA-5 balances the goals and expectations of their district's LCAP with input from other stakeholders:

Well, we have what we call, well, our LCAP Advisory Committee. And our LCAP Advisory Committee is composed of principals, teachers, parents, classified staff, classified union, and certificated union members. And did I say parents? Parents, all of us [instructional] cabinet [members] and then the directors. So, every decision comes through that committee. We always look at what the board wants. What are their priorities? And we make sure that we align the LCAP to their priorities.

Parents are Considered Stakeholders

COA-6, a colleague of COA-5, emphatically expresses the expectation that all those invested in a student's education be heard; that engaging parents in their child's education is vital to the success of student learning, saying:

So, we're really excited about how to, you know, build a districtwide program, parent-wise. I think our parents, they're motivated, and they want to participate and be engaged in their students' education. I think it's really dialing in to how we can [work] with them... it's just it's a big balancing act for our parents right now. And I think we just need to shift with the... demands and challenges within the home and try to... shift in education on how to meet those needs for our parents, so that they are still participating with their students' education.

Part of COA-3's decision-making practice is to be a life-long learner, so they put themselves in the shoes of the parents, especially when there is conflict, to learn more about what is needed for students. COA-3 says:

I think it's about creating... our work is to create an environment where everyone can be heard. When you ask my role, I do a lot of questioning. I do a lot. I try to make sense of the information... and be a better contributor. I think that's my role. I did it with IEPs too. I always put myself in the parent's perspective. You know, if, what would I be asking if I was a parent, what would I be asking if I was a principal and didn't have any information on this, or what am I really struggling with? And just being very honest and open with that process. I don't mind showing people that I don't know, I don't mind showing people that I am a fellow learner in this process.

COA-1 expresses that perhaps the district is not as open to engaging parents as it could be. They acknowledge that the parents have questions and want information, and sometimes they request accountability from the highest levels. COA-1 acknowledges parents can also advocate more strongly than, perhaps, a district official, saying:

They all talk about wanting to be transparent and getting parents involved, but they don't *want* parents to be knowledgeable and involved. They've tried to cut the [parent council] and... that group advocated...at the board meeting [in a way] that I couldn't do... I can't say the things that they can... ask questions publicly... Can we please ask [the assistant superintendent] to report back on that?

Focus group participants were asked focus group question 11: *What do you think needs further examination such that it might assist you, and perhaps others, in your work?* AEC-1 responded:

One of the things that I think is going to be key is community and parents. That's on our list to have the support of community and parents; it's going to help fuel our program. If you don't have that support, then it's like ... That'll push it. Right now, I'm working on... proposing networking with the school district with [arts partners]. These are all partners I've been working with... But we also want to reach out, and part of our strategic plan was to reach out to community, and that includes local colleges, so we can have some ... We've lost our connections [used to have] better connections with our local colleges. We can help our students; we can help our programs.

Authority to Decide

All administrative participants state they have the authority to decide. COA-3 says they are “able to make decisions that need to be made... [having] [been given the directive of it” and having direct access to the superintendent should they need it. COA-3 is very comfortable with their authority to make decisions, stating:

I am able to make decisions that need to be made. I've been given the directive of it. Doesn't have to be done the same way that it's been done in the past, but we do need to make sure we're moving to our district goals and the needs of our students. So, I do meet with the superintendent. If I get to something that's gonna be controversial, then we'll talk, and I'll get direction on which way we want to go as a district. But I've been given the ability to make those decisions.

This is a common attribute, to be able to make non-controversial decisions as needed. COA-5 is comfortable with their relationship with the assistant superintendent, re-counting:

The assistant superintendent allows more flexibilities. Right. So, if I'm the director, right, so [they] say, then I should be able to make those decisions. And then as long as I collaborate with [them] and let [them] know, [they] don't have to give the final okay. So, if we think that's what's going to work, then [they] let us just do that, which is nice instead of micromanaging our decisions.

In two out of four districts there is an assistant superintendent or director overseeing elementary arts as opposed to an arts coordinator, and they have direct authority to make decisions and enact policy.

We have a new leadership team and this leadership team's approach is really, what should I say, it's not micromanaging. It's the complete opposite, you know, [of what it used to be.] It's just, they hire you with the understanding and the trust and confidence that you can perform your job... roles and responsibilities. So, when I assume this role, I really have the authority to perform and do my job duties as I see, knowing my expectations.

Participant COA-2 says that when something is “going to be controversial,” it is the assistant superintendent who takes decision-making directly to the superintendent when it appears that something is going to be a challenge. COA-2 is such an administrator, but uses that access to the superintendent judiciously:

So, I have a lot of authority, but I don't abuse that either. So right before I'm gonna make, what I think is the right decision, I run down to the superintendent, let [them] know what I'm doing in case [they] have any questions or want to

tweak it or shut me down. That doesn't happen very often, but once in a while [they] might know something I don't. And so I'm always trying to make sure that all those big things go by [them] first, but [they're] very accessible to me. And after that, I'm pretty much free to implement. And there's a lot of lower-level decisions that I don't consult [them] on. But I'm talking about the big-ticket ones that I know are gonna get a union response or a board response, or a principal response. You know, I make sure they are always in the loop in terms of prior prioritization.

Most arts coordinators, who are not always administrators, are often charged with guiding implementation at the school site and find the authority to decide does not necessarily translate to their ability to make something happen with school-based administrators. COA-1 remarks that it is a challenge to encourage a school site principal to do something as they are the lead administrator of their school. An out-of-classroom arts designee has “no weight against a principal or another manager.” When a district arts coordinator is an actual administrator, they can present the case more definitively with a school-based administrator for “trying to get them to understand what it is like to be a teacher that has to [set up an instructional] space, tear down a space, [and] drive their car to another space.”

AEC-2 acknowledges that a lot of their work is to assist those at the school site, that they have some authority to decide things and guide others. They also share that the district occasionally gives them some assistance getting the job done. AEC-2 says:

I do have some say in what happens with what I work on in the arts. A lot of it is helping teachers and school programs move from one rung to the next, and a lot of that involves fundraising and grant writing. So, we've had a lot of losses too in

the last couple years, not just because of COVID. Going into COVID, we had budget cuts and lost teachers and programs, and I lost my help that I'd finally gotten for... So, I had him for a couple of years.

So, when they changed my position to arts and CTE coordinator, I was very concerned about who was going to make sure that all of the arts, all strategic work, was being continued and maintained. So, they kept the arts, the VAPA teacher on special assignment, and he became the teacher on special assignment, and he assisted me with everything... But then they cut his position. Now he's in the classroom helping on the side.

Fear in Decision-making

The literature produced the theme of fear in decision-making, making the point that if someone dare disagree in group decision-making, they might be removed. The interview data revealed that those who oversee the arts face push-back from other administrators, even retribution, evidencing Key Finding 7: *Arts Education Coordinators (AEC) are aware of their own influence on arts programming and face potential challenges from other administrators.* COA-1 speaks of an illusory supervisor with whom they have had difficulty, remarking that “you don’t know what they are thinking.” It elicits worry from staff as they wonder what will happen next. COA-1 says, “...two people were fired, and we didn’t even know there was a problem... all of a sudden they’re gone.” COA-1 expresses great dismay in their experiences standing ground when fighting potential cuts to the point of it damaging a long-standing, administrative relationship. They relate the following story:

We had an incident where there was a teacher on a temporary contract, [and the fiscal department representative eventually said] ... [the teacher] needs to go...

[and they] just wanted to do it quietly... [they sent me] a form saying, “Do you want to rehire this person?” [But] I said, “Yes, I do.” [The fiscal representative and I have] known each other [for a long time] so it was not pretty. [The fiscal representative] was really mad at me and I... came to the board meeting and said...”We need those teachers...” And so basically... I got what I wanted... but [they] wrote a letter of reprimand. I have a letter of reprimand in my file over that.

COA-1 feels the pressure of their position, saying, “I think they... keep me under control. To be honest, I think they really didn't wanna have me saying anything I shouldn't say.”

Disagreement or Fear in Decision-making

The literature review also revealed that there are often disagreements in decision-making that are negative in their conflict resolution, but most administrators spoke of embracing disagreement in their group decision-making. Administrator question 5 asks: *How do you feel when a decision is made, and you don't agree with it?* Its follow-up questions explore the potential feelings of fear and discomfort in disagreement. They are: a) *Do you speak up in a group when a decision is being made?*; b) *How do you feel when a policy requires you make a decision a certain way and you don't agree with the policy?*; and c) *What actions do you take on the subject when you have those feelings?* The data demonstrated that administrators welcome disagreement as a part of respecting the voice of all stakeholders, but they still experience fear and discomfort. COA-3 appreciates that the dialogue employs an explicit practice engaging others in a decision, saying:

I think disagreement is part of the learning process, right? I mean, that's part of the engagement. I can't tell you how many times I thought I had the best way of doing something, but through disagreement, all of a sudden, something emerges

out of that conversation that was better than I thought. And I don't take this personally. I have a different perspective... We wanna make sure we're making the best decisions, but it's nothing personal. Even when the parents are disagreeing... I hope I never get jaded to the point that I don't seek...

I would get them into the conversation. Yeah. I don't mind people disagreeing with me. You know, again, if we set up a space or a, you know, norms of working respectfully and collaboratively and professionally, and knowing the norms of, you know, of collaboration, then I'm fine with disagreeing with people and, you know, coming to an agreement together.

When the disagreement is driven by a disagreement with an existing policy, COA-6 feels entitled to question the policy with the group members, even comfortable changing the existing policy should it be necessary. They relate:

If there's a policy and I'm not agreeing with the policy and have to make a decision that's based on a policy, I have no problem questioning it. You know, in a respectful and professional manner... asking questions as to why, you know, like why is this policy in place? In my previous district that I was working in I did run into that a lot because there was more of this culture of past practice, you know, it's something that's been done. So that's just the way we do it, that's our policy. And sometimes it didn't make sense to me in my head as to why are we doing it this way.

[What if] it's not good for students, you know? And it doesn't make sense; it doesn't follow CDE's guidelines? When things like that pop up, I have no problem asking why what's going on, kind of getting the history over there. I

always used to get history and understand, really understand... why this policy may be existing. And if I had the authority, which I did sometimes in the previous district, I would, I would update the policy. I would change the policy. And again, I'd do it working with people who maybe have created that policy in the past and getting their input or getting a team or a committee, you know, just to make sure I'm covering all my bases and getting everybody that's involved--or that needs to be--their input and their opinions.

Administrators speak about dealing with disagreement on decisions for elementary arts education with language that refers to how to behave when a group is in dialogue. Their language does not explicitly state that they bring instructional expectations into those conversations or use those expectations as a guide for the dialogue. It should be noted that participants were not asked directly about the language they use, but rather what their feelings were when they were engaging in dialogue.

Policy and Politics in Decision-making

Policy is a two-edged sword. It can provide ballast for an administrator who needs to make a decision and hold true to it in the face of external criticism, or it can be the thorn in an administrator's side, keeping them from enacting something that they think needs to happen. No matter, policy and politics are the driving force behind conversation and what gets done in a district.

In AEC-1's district, policy is the dominant point of conversation in their monthly meetings with their supervising director. AEC-1 says, "We do have meetings, but it's not really how we integrate with one another, it's more about what's happening district-wide... it's mainly more about district-wide policies, [not] necessarily about instruction." AEC-5 says that

administrator dialogue about arts education is not so much about the instruction but that they usually talk about policy. They lament that “sometimes the instructional part of it gets left out” of group conversation.

Sometimes the district and community make the arts a political issue. Two administrators interviewed spoke about local ballot measures that promised more arts if people voted a certain way. In one case, the measure backfired, causing cuts to programming as the consequence. COA-2 relates a non-arts story where they were required to participate with the Board of Education and the community that resulted in a failed attempt to change policy. They shared:

As a result, the board wanted us to change the policy... so we created a policy that took [certain information] into consideration and the board overruled us...So, I mean, I just feel like as long as I have done the best job that I can and I've spoken my heart, I laid it out. Then what they decide is on them... so now we have a policy-- it's just more restrictive than we wanted it to be.

COA-3 is very realistic about how policy can help get things done or wind up creating conflict. Sometimes, the decision that needs to be made is controversial, and the politics can become very involved. They feel that if all voices are heard, the final decision should be respected, saying:

There are some things we do not have control of. And when you talk about policy, we are always looking at how can we implement, but yet do what is best for kids, right? What latitude do we have within that policy? With our current cabinet and senior administration, we will talk about things, and we have the ability to disagree, or say, “Hey, you know, I'm not sure. Let's look at it this way.” But ultimately, there will be a decision made... that wasn't a decision that you wanted, but as long as

people are being heard and were able to express our different opinions, I think that, that I'm okay with that.

COA-1 walks a fine line between working with the community, staying supportive to their district supervisors, and doing what is right for arts instruction. COA-1 is confident when to apply pressure for good reason and is appropriately cautious, knowing how to navigate diplomatic waters judiciously, saying, “I had to play a little dirty politics, but we had people with pitch forks and torches at the board meeting saying, ‘Why are you cutting this?’” COA-1 laments that they can’t stop community members from their own behavior, even when the supervisors are asking COA-1 to do just that; stop people from speaking up.

Prioritizing Decision-making

Implicit in the word “prioritization” is that there is a hierarchy of things that can be leveraged against each other to see what is most or least important in decision-making. Having to decide what is or is not a priority implies one must engage in a series of steps to make that decision, whether they say it is a conscious process or not. Administrator question 4 asked administrators--*What steps do you take when making a decision?*--and the follow-up questions seeking clarification--*What do you do when you don't know everything you need to know when making a decision?*—and--*Do you seek resource from anyone?* Responses demonstrate a fundamental motivation for central office administrative decision-making to provide for students’ well-being and is expressed in Key Finding 6: *All study participants claim they want to do what is best for students, but only three of twelve explicitly spoke of equity in their decision-making.*

Concept of What's “Best for Students”

When speaking of creating or maintaining elementary arts programming, most administrators spoke of wanting to do, in their opinion, “what’s best for children,” but doing what’s best only went as far as funding or scheduling would potentially allow. The participants seemed to want to communicate that this is where their passion lies--doing what is best for kids. COA-3 sees speaking with the assistant superintendent as an opportunity to adjust programming in the best interest of the students, saying:

I just wanna make sure that... I'd never want the person above me to be walking off a cliff. I wanna make sure they see everything ahead of them. And then when the decision's made, I'm gonna support it 100%. But I'm gonna manipulate it as much as I can to beat the interest of our kids.

COA-6 wished that it be known about them that they wish to do what is right for kids, appealing, “I just hope I was able to articulate that I'm student [-centered], you know? If it's something the students need, want, or don't have, I'm all about getting them what they need.”

The passion for students is evident in COA-1’s expressed core value in doing what is best for students. While the arts themselves are so important for students, it is also the ancillary benefit of a student’s social-emotional growth that motivates their advocacy for equity in access. They related a story about a student performance in which a student with autism made a loud noise. They emphasized:

I watched the other kids when that happened. It's like, we're singing a nice song and that happens! But what are we teaching kids? We're teaching them two things. We're teaching them arts and we're teaching them how to be understanding of others and their life; that we need to embrace everyone, you know, and just

find a way to make everyone feel like they're [valuable]... And then there's the people that say, "Oh, that's not the best performance."

Clear Steps in Decision-making

Having clear steps in decision-making provides decision-makers with a kind of accountability. If they engage in group decision-making, they are mindful that they need to pursue all available resources and hear the many points of views. COA-4 considers administrator question 4 which asks about the steps in decision-making and the different strategies for working together to achieve that goal, saying:

Well, since I'm newer to this position, I seek this all the time. I'll ask questions. For example, we're expanding our transitional kindergarten next year. I worked with our labor partners. We created a subcommittee where we could work together to try to figure out the best way to move forward or at least [make] recommendations of that. I think that we have a great team, we have a very small team, but we have a great team that [is] willing to come together and work to solve issues as they come up. I don't think right now we have anyone who is, stuck in the mud, if you will. People are willing to, I think, [be] flexible and everything seems to be pivoting so quickly that we're getting a little bit used to making decisions always based on what's best for our students and our families...

I talk to the team or the person who would have some knowledge of what has been done in the past, and I'll ask questions why it is done that way, or is there a better way to do it? Just because we know the way we have done it doesn't mean it's the way we have to continue to do it. It's always evaluating what is best moving forward.

Framing the Decision-making Problem

Framing the decision-making problem is a wide-open proposition, fraught with many variables both instructional and social-emotional. Participants were asked administrator question 4--*What steps do you take when making a decision?*--and the follow-up questions--*What do you do when you don't know everything you need to know when making a decision?*--and--*Do you seek resource from anyone?* The data in this study shows administrators and arts coordinators grapple with these variables, yet the rhetoric and guideposts for discussion are scattered and largely unpredictable; sometimes administrator reflection is influenced by personal bias. Key Finding 3 states: *Administrator decision-making steps are guided by well-intentioned personal bias and only occasionally intentionally guided by state policy or standards, data, instructional practice, or student entitlement.* COA-2 moves through their frustration as they search for words to express the singular, vital point that it might help if decision-makers begin with the result in mind, saying:

The experiences of our students, I think when, I mean, one of the things that we have to... oftentimes it becomes about the conversation, [it] ends up being about the adults and or the budget or what teachers or admins do or don't wanna do, you know, those kinds of things. When, if we can try to reframe and think about what kind of experiences we really want for our children, you know, that would be so great. So, then we wouldn't be at odds, but because our kids, all they want, they deserve it all.

To frame the decision, most administrators interviewed initially stay in touch with their superintendent and then begin referring to their instructional cabinet when making a decision. If they need more information, they may go to another resource for information. COA-2 relates:

So, the first thing I do is I talk to our leadership here at the district and see if I can get information there. Let's say it could be the CBO, or it could be the superintendent that may have some knowledge on something that I don't have. And then, if I don't get an answer there, my really go-to resources are LACO and CDE.

COA-6 is methodical in preparing for their decision-making, especially when it will result in major changes in programming. They outline their process in evaluating secondary CTE programming, saying:

I went through a whole evaluation process to get to the point of making a decision of which academies were gonna be moving forward and which ones were no longer going to exist. And I went through each [CTE pathway]. We did student surveys. We did a program evaluation from the elements of a high quality program. We did a teacher evaluation where they self-evaluate, and we also met as teams... So, when the arts team met ... I had met with them previously for a check-in and I had kept them in the loop through this whole time... so the previous meeting, I had a little lunch check-in with them and said, "Hey, this is the update on the student surveys and the evaluations?" And we're gonna sit down and really look based on a little rubric that I created, on which ones look stronger to move forward.

Clear steps in framing the decision-making may work well in a group when the members have a nice fit or the different personalities of the room may dramatically alter the direction of the flow of conversation. COA-4 describes such a situation with imagery, saying:

You asked them the question of the role of people around us and the role that we were playing. And depending, we have two different layers of that cake. We have... our senior cabinet [in] attendance [with] districts all around California who are sharing ideas, talking about how they're moving this work forward at their school districts. And then we take it to our principal level where we're being a part of the process of getting it to them. So, I think each one, each group has a unique flavor to it, a dynamic. I guess it depends on who's in the room, what their interests are. The personalities in the room all play into how you manage the work. We have at our principal level; we have some of that. You have to elicit their input by directly asking them a question. Then you have some that would be glad to shove whatever input that they wanted down your throat, and a lot in-between.

Using Data to Frame the Decision

It is noteworthy that few to none of the administrators or focus group participants voluntarily referred to data as a tool for decision-making on elementary arts education. When asked, they might refer to using secondary data to report course enrollment and demographics. But at the elementary level, it is rather subjective if an administrator uses data to document impact from access to elementary arts education. COA-5 reminisces:

And so, you see the children are happy, it's a visual, that you could see that they enjoy them. When they do their art, we have an art fair, we sell the art for the kids, and so then they feel really proud that the art's being bought by their parent, or maybe sometimes by another person, and so that's very beneficial. So that's--I guess we don't have a specific measure--but it's more of a subjective measure, but

we also know that their reading scores really improve in their math... the kids who are in band tend to do better than the kids who are not in band, which is very interesting.

While interesting and supported by research, the administrator's perspective is that this data about students in band doing better than others is not hard data about what happens to elementary-aged students with access to arts learning. There is simply limited data on elementary arts education in public schools.

Funding is an indirect source of data that can be used to frame a decision-making conversation about elementary arts education, albeit with a non-instructional focus. COA-2 may not even have the luxury of being concerned with the actual content when concerns about the funding are the overriding conversation. COA-2 outlines the frame of discussion, saying:

So, we have our 3%, you know, reserve. Well, if you get to that third year out [on your district's stabilization plan] and you're not gonna be solvent, like say you're gonna be 4 million short or whatever, you have to have a stabilization plan to deal with that shortage, which means a plan of cuts. So, we have a list of about, you know, 15 items--that's where you start from the core program. Okay. So, we need English and math teachers and then everything else we add in, you know?

Use of Content Knowledge to Decide

It becomes a conundrum when administrators engage in group decision-making in a group in which the membership has only personal experience to provide as background for topic discussion. It becomes a decision based on consensus rather than evidentiary data. There is a saying from information technology that says, "garbage in, garbage out (GIGO)" (Oxford Dictionary, n. d.). This is not to say that an administrator's formative experiences are garbage

and so not valuable in decision-making; their experience may be quite informative. It's just that it might be better to provide appropriate evidence or peer-reviewed data to improve the decision-making and, thusly, the outcome. It is even more important when an administrator is guiding the superintendent of a district, who may have limited knowledge, to make a final decision. There must be someone on the decision-making team who either has that knowledge or knows how to get it. COA-1 has a very supportive superintendent but one who has no background in the arts. COA-1 says, "I don't think [they] know much about it... [but] they're supportive... of me and our program. A few years ago, [they]... told the community the things we do best in our district... number one was our visual performing arts program."

Accessing Resource People or Acting as One to Others Who Make Decisions

Most participants in the study with no access to an arts coordinator express comfort in seeking out others who can provide evidence to inform their decision-making. COA-6 states:

I go to the CDE consultants online, so I'll go to the website, and I'll look for our resources that we have there, you know, I [ask] teachers or colleagues at the county level that might be able to point me in the right direction. But those are the kind of the resources I would use.

Use of Personal Experience or Training to Decide

Some administrators are comfortable sharing information about their personal experiences with the arts and allude to the fact that it influences their decision-making. This is reflected in Key Finding 3: *Administrator decision-making steps are guided by well-intentioned personal bias and only occasionally intentionally guided by state policy or standards, data, instructional practice, or student entitlement.*

COA-5 shares:

Well, so we always look and see what's the best way to help students develop their brain, because you have to look at the whole child. I was never a music person; I never played an instrument. Oh, I did learn how to play the piano, but very basic. I had a teacher who did the piano, and so she taught us a lot about the importance of the right brain and how music really develops that piece of the brain. And so having her teach us that piece (I was an administrator at the middle school) then that became a learning for me. [I thought] “Oh, well, we need to make sure that we always have music because it really helps develop those students' right brain, right?” And even though they may not be learning how to read music, it will help them be able to learn how to read and so that was something really important to me, for my own learning.

Inconsistent, Discrepant, or Unexpected Findings

Key Finding 1: *Arts Education Coordinators (AEC) influence student access to elementary arts education.*

Key Finding 4: *Most decision-making about elementary arts education is done by group consensus.*

There were inconsistent responses to administrator question 3--*How do central office administrators and arts education coordinators/designees perceive the arts learning experiences of racially and economically minoritized elementary students?*—a very broad question that can address myriad topics. The data from that question was partly responsible for Key Finding 1: *Arts Education Coordinators (AEC) influence student access to elementary arts education.* It is possibly ambiguous of intent in that it refers to administrator perception of student experiences as opposed to being written like the rest of the questions that explicitly asked about administrator

practice, the challenges of decision-making, and the nature of programming. The question was designed so as not to lead the participant in their responses about equity, but to open the door to analyzing the language they use to describe their thoughts, observations, and reflections on how they are providing for equitable instruction for their students.

The most discrepant and unexpected finding was Key Finding 4: *Most decision-making about elementary arts education is done by group consensus*. The literature review revealed that there is indeed group decision-making, but that any conflict or disagreement is quickly shut down or even punished with dismissal of personnel. That is surprisingly not in alignment with the responses from the administrative participants. They contributed that they welcome the dialogue when someone in the group disagrees, seeing it as a healthy exchange of ideas. However, anonymous arts coordinators spoke with the understanding that they were off the record, expressing that they know when not to push during group decision-making; that they know when they are too close to the line in advocating for instruction. They are free to disagree in group dialogue so long as they are not pushing for something administration already does not want, even if it is best for students. No evidence to this experience is presented in this paper so as not to compromise the participants.

Summary

This chapter presents the findings of data collected to address the research questions of the study organized by the conceptual framework and elucidated by the dominant themes that emerged. The conceptual framework developed from the literature review, founded on three theories, provided the foundation for the entire study. It served to develop the research questions and guide the interview and focus group questioning of participants and the document review. Leveraging the data from participant responses against this conceptual framework might serve to

generate a paradigm shift in thought for administrators as they come to understand the implications for student access resultant of their decision-making. In Chapter V, the researcher will interpret and discuss the findings considering the study's research questions, literature review, and conceptual framework. The chapter will conclude with recommendations for policy and practice and propose additional research topics for the field that can lead toward more equitable decision-making designed to improve student access to elementary arts education.

Chapter V: Discussion and Conclusions

This final chapter examines, interprets, and discusses the nature of the key findings from the administrative interviews, focus group, and district document review. The discussion makes comment upon administrative priorities in decision-making for and equitable access to elementary arts education by connecting the themes from the conceptual framework to the data from the research questions.

This study set out to explore the factors in decision-making that may influence administrative decision-making and revealed its dynamic impact upon access in equity. As the study progressed, comparative analysis of the data begat even more questions about the process of decision-making for elementary arts education and revealed related topics vital to creating change and improving access. Accordingly, this chapter makes recommendations for more effective decision-making because the context of the key findings indicates by engaging in certain administrative practices it may increase accountability in equity for students (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019).

Chapter Organization

This chapter first summarizes the study and restates the problem, its purpose and rationale. Next, it reiterates the research questions and the methodology of collecting the data. It provides a justification for the analysis, reminding the reader about the foundational theoretical frameworks guiding the study. The discussion proceeds, making comment to the data and its key findings in relationship to the research questions. Summative implications about policy are asserted and recommendations to improve decision-making practices and their potential impact on student access to elementary arts education. Lastly, suggestions for further research are addressed to the field.

Summary of the Study

Study Description

This study is an exploration into administrator perceptions of their instructional decision-making as it relates to equitable access to elementary arts education in suburban public schools in Southern California. It also explored arts education coordinators perceptions of their influence on decision-making as they work in the central office implementing arts programs and acting as a resource to others. Further evidence was gathered for cross-checking purposes by reviewing publicly available district organizational documents such as any strategic plan or Board of Education (BOE) policies where available (Durdella, 2019).

Research Problem

There is inconsistent program implementation and inequitable access to elementary arts education curriculum and instruction, especially for racially and economically minoritized students in California's public elementary schools (CREATE CA, 2019). U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan called this "an equity issue and a civil rights issue" (Parsad, 2012; Duncan, 2012, p. 26). It is an issue of equity when students are provided unequal access to public resources that demonstrate the ability to improve students' educational experience (Civil Rights Act of 1964, Pub. L. 88-352, 78 Stat. 241 (1964)). It is especially important to expose the inequities in access to elementary arts education as there is much research pointing to its value in the curriculum (Catterall, 1999). Knowingly or unknowingly not providing equitable elementary arts education for all children is creating a social injustice that is unnecessarily discriminatory to students.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore factors affecting administrative prioritization practices in decision-making regarding the implementation of standards-based elementary arts education curriculum and instruction. There is a gap in the research examining the experiences of administrators or arts education coordinators/designees in central offices of instruction, especially as it relates to decision-making for elementary arts education as evidenced by the lack of published research. The rationale for this study is that all students should have access to an education that develops cognition, improves literacy, and creates learner agency, such that a student can participate actively in their community. It is anticipated that a better understanding of administrators' prioritization practices in decision-making may help administrators proceed from a more informed perspective, thus remedying the inconsistent implementation and inequitable access to arts education, especially for our racially and economically minoritized students in public elementary schools.

The following research questions guided this study:

- What factors affect central office administrators' prioritization practices in decision-making regarding the implementation of standards-based elementary arts education curriculum and instruction in urban- suburban elementary schools?
- What do arts education coordinators/designees perceive as their influence upon decision-making regarding elementary arts education in central offices of instruction?
- How do central office administrators and arts education coordinators/designees perceive the arts learning experiences of racially and economically minoritized elementary students?

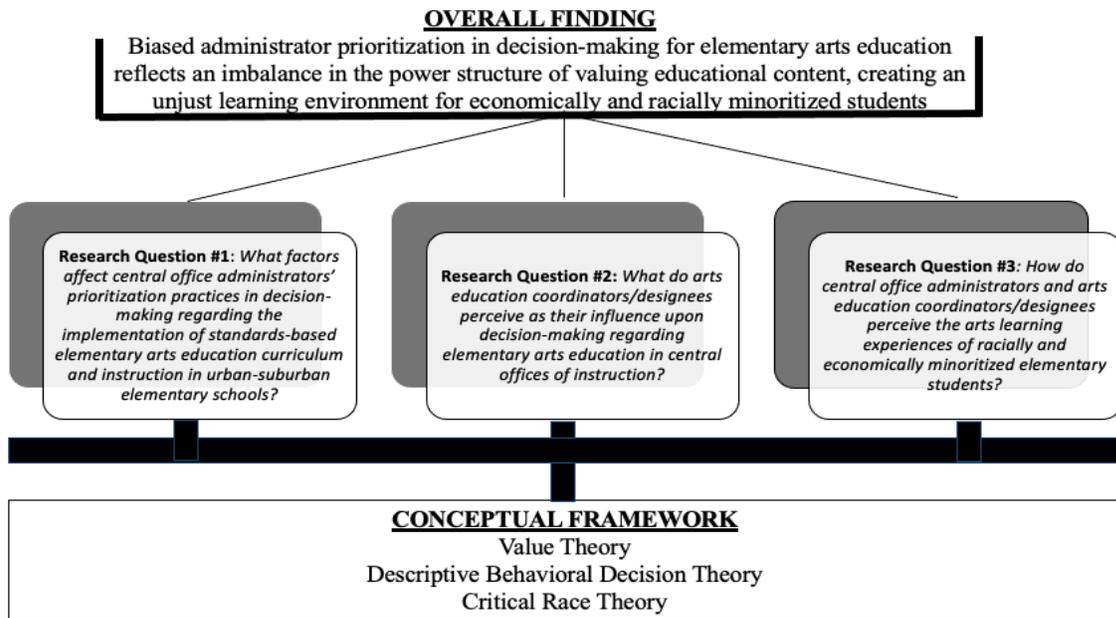
The data collected was sufficient to address the three research questions and correspondingly establish the findings within the theoretical framework created by the intersect of three theoretical concepts: a) Values Theory, b) Critical Race Theory, and c) Descriptive Behavioral Decision Theory. The themes revealed through the literature review also found expression in the data collected by the tools; however, the relevance of these themes was found to be weighted differently in the data collection as compared to the literature review.

Methodology

This qualitative study was designed using a grounded theory approach, making sense of seemingly unrelated behaviors (Durdella, 2019) in decision-making that result in challenges to student access to elementary arts education. Three theories worked together to provide a foundation for the exploration of this study, the generation of its research questions, and the data analysis (see Figure 3).

Figure 3

Conceptual Framework, Research Questions, Overall Finding



Date created: 2022

Four school districts were selected for this study while five central office administrators and five arts education coordinators were interviewed for their stories, perceptions, and knowledge about decision-making for elementary arts education. They all related many common experiences, yet the context of those experiences varied greatly. Following each administrator interview and the focus group, the researcher journaled personal notes about overall impressions (Maxwell, 2013). The nuances of their experiences provided depth of understanding to the topic and were reflected in the findings of the study.

Discussion

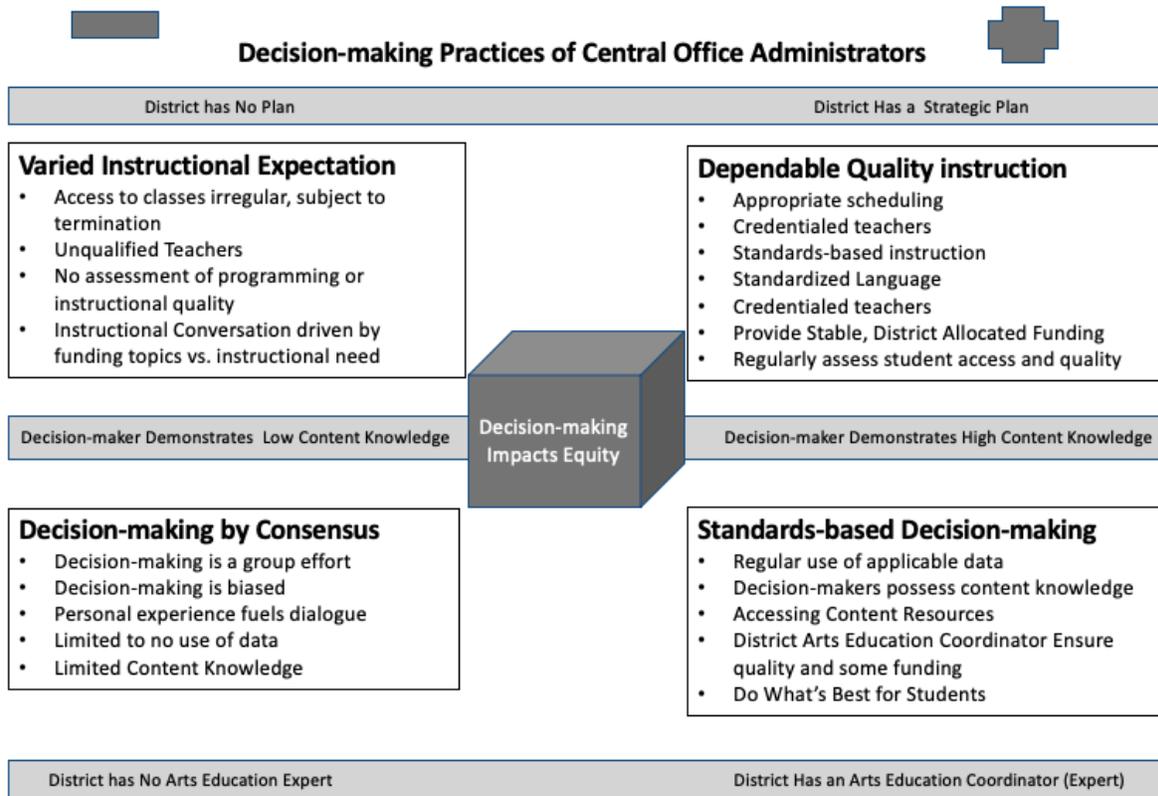
Summary of the Results

A Tool for Analysis: The Quadrant Chart

It is common for businesses to utilize various chart formats prior to decision-making (Schooley, 2019) or when engaging in any actions related to a change theory model to reflect on the dynamic elements of the situation. Such a tool is the SWOT chart (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats). The SWOT chart was developed by Albert Humphrey in the 1960s when he was a researcher at the Stanford Research Institute. The Institute was seeking to understand why some business planning repeatedly failed. The result was the development of a protocol using a tool, the SWOT chart, which explores the relationship between the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats to any given project or *identified endeavor*. The SWOT chart can signify each of the four quadrants of the chart as needed for exploration and analysis of a situation or product. In the case of this study's research, a quadrant chart (see Figure 4) helps the reader to visualize the relationship between administrative decision-making practices regarding elementary arts education and its impact on student equity needs.

Figure 4

Decision-making Practices of Central Office Administrators



Date created: 2022

This, of course, presupposes that, in a school district's case, the district is in agreement that they are purposefully involved in an *identifiable endeavor*. Clearly, having a recognizable BOE policy or strategic plan addressing the arts in education demonstrates an agreement that the district is engaged in such an endeavor. In this study's use of a quadrant chart, each of the four quadrants represents the primary practices of decision-making expressed by the participants. The left side of the chart (the negative) lists practices which do not contribute to quality and more sustainable elementary arts instruction, thus improving equitability. The right side of the chart (the positive) lists practices expressed by some of the participants that seemingly do produce the results of increased programming, program sustainability, instructional quality, and thus equity

in access to appropriate instruction. This chart is designed to be a starting point for discussion, reflective of the findings but not necessarily diagnostic or prescriptive of the problem.

It can be gathered that use of a decision-making tool such as a quadrant chart might also be of some use to central office administrators to improve their practice. In this case, it acts not only as a tool for analysis of the findings in this research study but beneficially, can be looked at as a model for administrators to reflect on their practice as decision-makers. Just as this tool is being used to shed light on the fact that administrators often engage in biased decision-making, using a tool such as this during a decision-making moment can help reveal factors that challenge a given arts education topic and redirect the dialogue of a group away from bias back to policy, evidence, and data. This is important, as invisible or informal policies for behavior can be revealed using a tool for reflection, shedding light on “policies” that, in fact, are people’s opinions about what they think is right rather than policy that has been vetted and formally agreed upon. The transparency created using a quadrant chart, or *any* protocol tool, is that it may result in a more honest decision than one that is subject to unpredictable thinking. The frightening part is that it may result in an honest decision that is also the antithesis to an administrator’s personal point of view. This is a challenging prospect, but it could end up being a more equitable way to make a decision.

Summary of the Research Questions

The summary of findings in this study point to three overall conclusions about the impact of administrator priorities in decision-making for elementary arts education that beg discussion and further examination: 1) Decision-making is often a biased group effort; 2) Administrators want to do what is best for students sustaining programming, but it may not be equitable; and 3) When there is an arts education coordinator and strategic plan or BOE policy in place, student

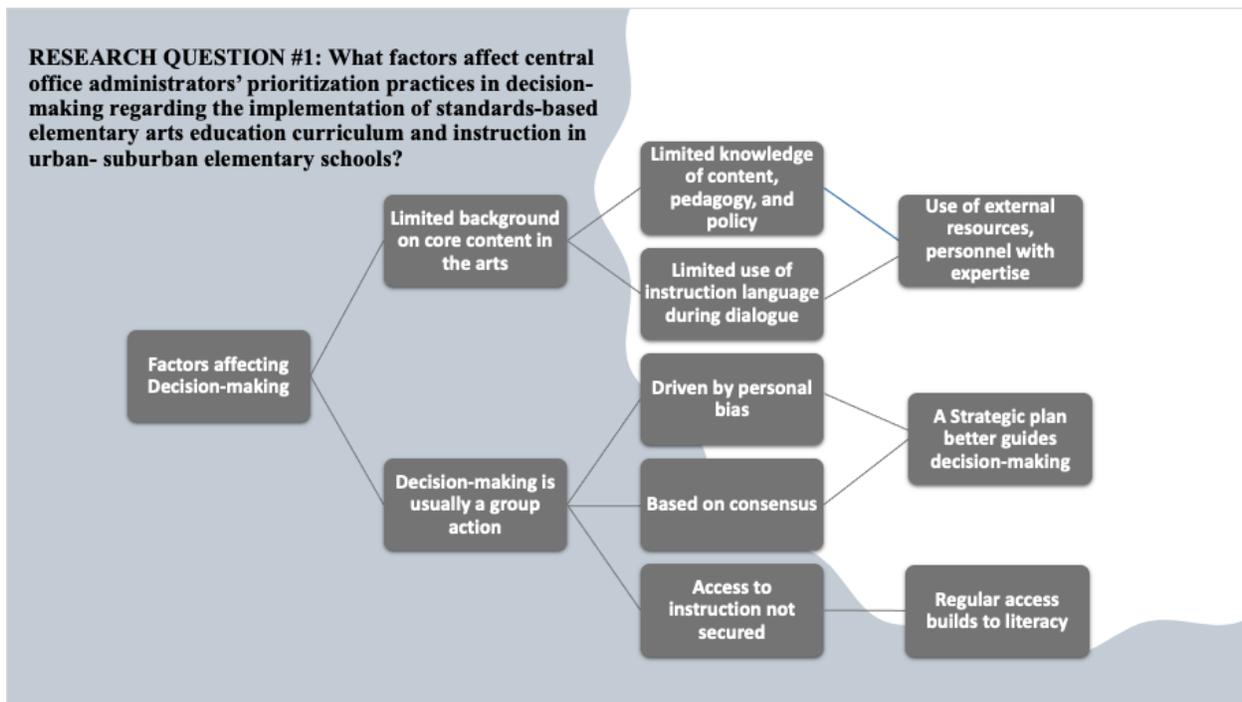
access may increase as there is growth in funding and expanded instructional expectation and quality.

Research Question #1

What factors affect central office administrators' prioritization practices in decision-making regarding the implementation of standards-based elementary arts education curriculum and instruction in California's urban-suburban elementary schools?

Figure 5

Flowchart of Research Question #1



Date Created: 2022

Decision-making is a Biased Group Decision

The first finding points to the dominant factor that decision-making is most often a biased group endeavor as opposed to being that of any singular person with expertise in the content.

While the BOE, with the support of the Superintendent, has the ultimate authority to make a

decision about elementary arts education, the details of implementation, quality of instruction, personnel, and student equity in access seems to be left up to the group decision-making of a stakeholder group or instructional cabinet, such as it may be, sometimes in collaboration with an arts education coordinator.

Collaborative thinking and decision-making are most often a reflection of the social values of those within the group (Tanaka, 2017). Recognizing group values is important as it leads to respect of all voices within the group and a decision all can support. This means, however, that everyone in the group must be clear about what they are valuing. If what is being valued reflects the precepts of equity and quality as well as standards based elementary arts instruction then it stands to reason the social values of the group will support an appropriate decision.

The challenge is that this study did not demonstrate that administrators purposefully prepare themselves for informed valuing and ultimate decision-making on the arts. It demonstrated that decision-making is by consensus of the group, no matter how well or ill-informed, or well-intentioned. COA-2 relates that this consensus building is a negotiation to create what they think is best:

All of us were [here] because [the superintendent] has to negotiate, right?

Everything that we decide. It's more about let's create the best program.

This can present a dangerous precedence for decision-making for elementary arts in that it might lack appropriate foundational content integrity, creating the potential for less than equitable results for students.

The analysis of the findings indicates that for a decision on elementary arts education to be equity-driven, that is respectful of all students' right to a well-rounded and innovative

education under the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), the considerations need to be based upon appropriate policy, an understanding that there be provision for implementation of quality instruction, and that there is equitable access to the elementary classes or secondary courses. A decision based on consensus might *feel* good for all involved, but for it to be accountable, it may be wise to use a decision-making tool, like a quadrant chart, to keep the dialogue honest to the topic.

Lacking Content Knowledge

Secondly, this study revealed the challenge that not all members of a decision-making group demonstrate knowledge about the instructional needs of elementary arts education and the group consensus may create an implementation policy with questionable instructional underpinnings or lacking in sensibility about student equity. COA-6 related that decision-making must be by consensus of the group when there is no information on the topic, saying:

... if I'm making a decision on something... I love to go ask people who do have that information... I like to approach things as a team. I love to bounce ideas off people.

This presents a dangerous precedence for decision-making in the arts, no matter how well-intentioned, as it may lack appropriate foundation of knowledge, creating the potential for less than equitable results for students.

The group will likely have members who have their own personal experiences on the topic and these experiences define their biases. They confidently take these biases into the decision-making process as if they were standardized evidence to be considered. Kennedy (1982b) refers to these experiences as “working knowledge,” defining it as an “entire array of

beliefs, assumptions, interests, and experiences that influences the behavior of individuals at work” (pp.1-28).

Just as we value the stories we are told when gathering data for qualitative research, it would behoove us to respect people’s experiences as part of the decision-making process as they are indeed relevant as they reflect the human experience. However, it is imperative that those personal stories are leveraged against the additional “working knowledge” of the content standards, national or state policies governing instruction, and the precepts of equity. Of course, it is not necessary that members of an instructional cabinet or stakeholder group have a college degree in every content area they oversee. A decision-making professional, however, whose practice it is to be aware of the content needs and advocacy pieces of a given content area is far preferable to one with no interest or background knowledge as they stand a greater chance of making a decision that is respecting of the content and more equitable for students.

Issues of Quality and Paralance of the Content. The data from this study does not reveal that issues of instructional quality occur within the common dialogue as a prerequisite for addressing equity in decision-making. Sahlberg (2012) asserts that, “equity in education indicates all students have access to a high-quality education” (para. 10), and this befits decision-makers to keep their focus on choices that breed quality. Adhering to research, standards, and policy may be a core value that requires discipline to maintain as an administrator if one’s bias, background, or perception is not in agreement with what the data demonstrates.

What administrators don’t speak about in relation to their decision-making may be far more telling than what they do speak about. This study demonstrated that talking about instruction in the arts using terminology of the content is not a natural occurrence. It is not a habit. For example, when asked about data on student achievement in elementary arts, COA-5

speaks about how students appear, saying, “And so, you see the children are happy, it's a visual, that you could see that they enjoy [performing].” Had the research participants been speaking about math or English Language Arts, there is likely no doubt that data, standards, and equity would have been established as prior to any conversation on instructional strategy and goals, but somehow that lens of consideration is not prevalent in conversation around the arts as evidenced here.

The literature review explored the idea that there is fear in decision-making-- fear of the unknown in the subject matter, fear of the repercussions from a decision gone wrong, or fear of the social or professional ostracization if one does not agree with upper management. Only one of the participants referred to any of that type of discomfort, the majority citing a warm welcome to disagreement in the consensus-building decision chamber. Research participant COA-3 appreciates the, saying:

I think disagreement is part of the learning process, right? I mean, that's part of the engagement. I can't tell you how many times I thought I had the best way of doing something, but through disagreement, all of a sudden, something emerges out of that conversation that was better than I thought.

The research in this study did not demonstrate that any central office administrator or arts education coordinator walked in fear amongst their colleagues, but they experienced frustration. The words that went *unspoken* in their responses speak volumes about a decision-making environment uncomfortable with or even bereft of the actual topic should it challenge existing perceptions about arts education in the curriculum. Had these administrators sought out research or other resources to support their decision-making, such as peer-based research, arts education

experts, or even a rudimentary Google search, they might have raised the bar on the conversation and redirected a bit more towards a decision based on standards and equity.

Seeking Resources. Intentional reference to research during dialogue on elementary arts education in decision-making is well-advised if the decision-making group is to be properly informed. Honig and Colburn (2008) refer to evidence in their study citing the need for diverse processes in decision-making in central offices; that use of research can be a factor in shaping how more effective decisions get made. As a result of their case study, Farley-Ripple (2012) asserts that it is imperative to increase the dissemination of information from research within the central office to improve its use in decision-making. In fact, decision-makers are more likely to be confident in their decisions when professing they accessed research to make their decision.

In situations where the participant administrator knew they had no one with expertise in the district to act as resource they might call the County Office of Education (COE). COA-6 states:

I go to the CDE [California Department of Education] consultants online, so I'll go to the website, and I'll look for our resources that we have there, you know, I [ask] teachers or colleagues at the county level that might be able to point me in the right direction.

Most administrative participants admitted to seeking out information to enlighten their decision-making when they felt that they did not have enough foundation of knowledge on the topic. They readily offered that they put the topic before their instructional team to get feedback. It is noteworthy that these team members did not necessarily have expertise in the arts, thus creating decision-making by consensus. But if an administrator can preface their announcement

by saying “research says,” (Colburn et al., 2009) they contend that it provides legitimacy to the decision and, as it follows, confidence.

The best case scenario was one in which the district had an arts education coordinator on staff who could provide consultation to the administrator and the instructional team, especially when it also referred to the strategic plan or BOE policy. In this manner, the decision-makers could understand the instructional breadth of the decision at hand and refer to policy for guidance on which steps to take.

Creating Policy for a Baseline of Acceptable Instruction

Thirdly, the data revealed that administrators strive to maintain a baseline of sustainable programming, which is determined mostly by the availability of funding rather than a recommended amount or type of instruction. COA-7 relates the conflict in decision-making to sustain a baseline of sustainable programming, acknowledging the inherent challenges in it, saying:

...the Local Control and Accountability Plan (LCAP), I think the universal truth [is] whether it's indirect or directly involved in the conversation is that there's usually conflict involved... so it's a stretch sometimes to say that arts integration or arts programming is going to directly serve those students when they have other needs that need to be met... That's sort of the conflict. It's a balance to be struck.

Administrators see and *feel* themselves to be student-centered and cling to this as a core value. COA-6 asserts, “I just hope I was able to articulate that I'm student [centered], you know? if it's something the students need want, or don't have, I'm all about getting them what they need.”

But the primary determinant for what is the baseline is determined by how much money they have as opposed to first defining for what it is best for students and that *that* is what they want to pay for. It seems that this is the preeminent nexus of ideas, understanding, experience, and focus for the participants in this study. COA-7 states:

...we have state priorities we're trying to meet. So, when we look at like, especially LCAP, there's a requirement or focus for those dollars to be spent on students... that are either associated economically to advantage the English Learners [or] foster youth and homeless youth.

Most language used in the participant data either started with talk of funding or eventually swung back to it when they spoke. In fact, it was clearly the jumping-off point for decision-making as opposed to where most educators prefer to begin--with the end in mind; “the end” should be all students receiving a well-rounded, innovative education implementing core instruction.

This begs consideration, then, that it may not be a true a baseline of sustainable instruction if funding relies heavily on fundraising by a random staff member, who may or may not always be employed by the school district, to solicit the community to feed the district’s budget. All five arts education coordinators spoke at length about their role in fundraising for the district and worried about the fact that their district either put forth no funding for core instruction in the arts apart from what the coordinator raised or, if they did, the district funding was not stable and varied from year to year.

That consideration can weigh heavily if that’s all you must hang on to as a decision-maker; it can feel like a helpless place to be in as there is so much that cannot be controlled. But the document review and data analysis demonstrated that where there was a strategic plan or

BOE policy for the district in place, combined with having an arts education coordinator, there stands a greater chance for more informed and consistent decision-making as there could be instructional guidelines and standards based language as a part of deliberation. Central office administrators could then value and advocate for the curriculum appropriately by; 1) making quality programming more available for students to access; 2) ensuring greater accountability for quality instruction; and 3) utilizing data on access, equity, and quality when dialoging with and reporting to the stakeholder groups.

Summary

In summary, data indicates all participants in the study want to achieve parity for students, but the concept of equity in the arts is not dependent upon students' rights to access it but upon how far the funding and group consensus reaches. Biased decision-making conversation about funding supersedes dialogue about access, equity, and quality for elementary arts education. This puts any programming in jeopardy as the type of instruction to be maintained is likely not going to boast the hallmarks of equity or quality.

Research Question #2

What do arts education coordinators/designees perceive as their influence upon decision-making regarding elementary arts education in central offices of instruction?

The Presence of an Arts Education Coordinator

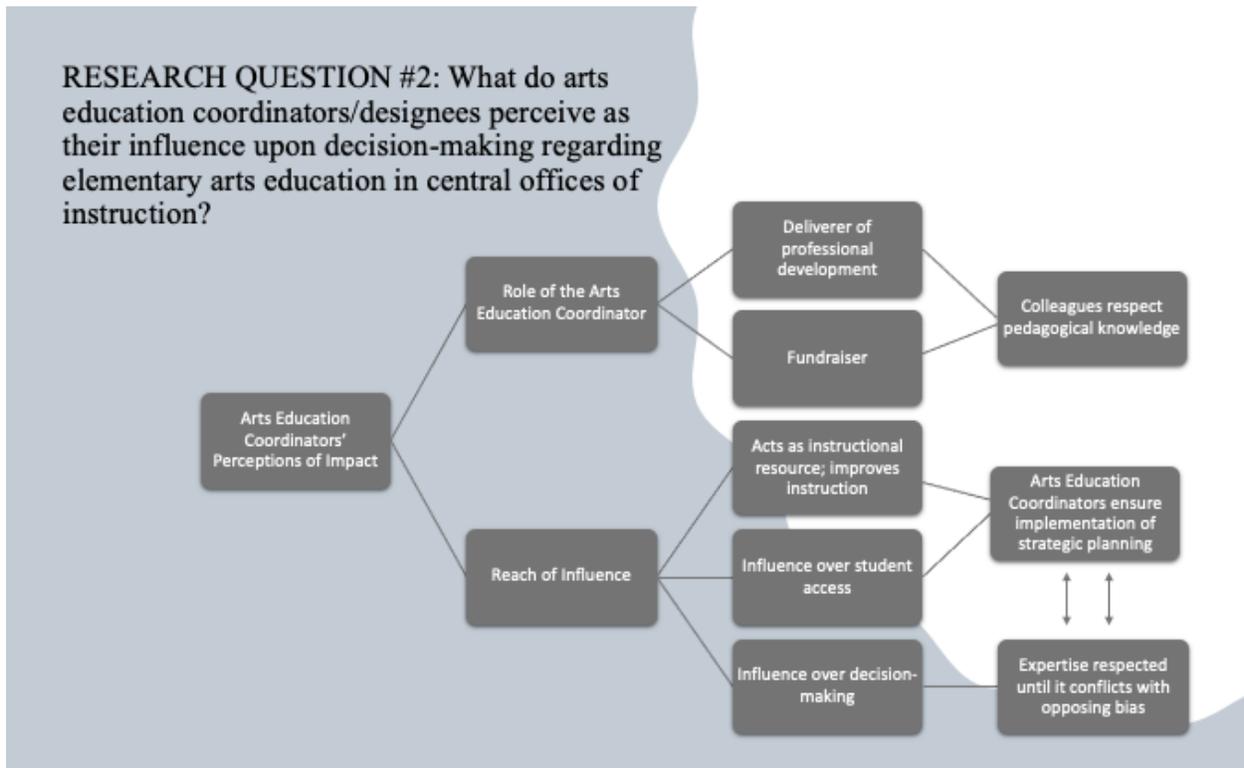
The data firstly revealed that where there is an arts education coordinator in the central office, influence may be assumed by observing that; 1) student access to quality instruction increases due to augmented funding garnered by the coordinator; 2) they act as a resource to other administrators; and 3) instructional quality is improved by coordinator-delivered professional development. Conversely, the findings demonstrate that where there is no arts

coordinator or designee expert, administrative designees do not express that they explicitly make effort to raise funds for programming; rather, they work to maintain whatever is currently existing. COA-4 refers to a grant they maintain after their coordinator leaves, stating, “My coordinator last year was very passionate about [the arts] and kind of helped really facilitate that and actually wrote a grant that we got for elementary arts education.”

Arts education coordinators are looked to for improved instruction and are expected to provide professional development. One out of five Central Office Administrators admitted to trepidation in providing professional development in the arts as they had no experience in it (see Figure 6).

Figure 6

Flowchart of Research Question #2: Perceptions of Impact



Date created: 2022

COA-4 states, “I don’t have expertise in a lot of the areas that we provide professional development for. I definitely rely on my team of experts to help guide our priorities.” COA-1 who is in a district with a strategic plan, implied that having standards-based curriculum increases student access, saying:

So... what structures are there? I mean, we wrote our arts curriculum, and we need to update that because we wrote it to the former standards... It was posted online to the new standards, but we're offering professional development in the new standards, and culturally relevant curriculum and so on.

When pressed for clarification, three out of seven Central Office Administrators with no strategic plan stated they call the County Office of Education and artists in residence as a resource for information on arts education. But AEC-3 sees teacher professional development as key to sustaining a quality program, and a generous portion of their daily tasks as an arts education coordinator, saying:

...there are some expectations [to the job] that are just part of [it].

For example, this last weekend I did a new teacher PD on arts integration. [The Department of Instruction] had a new teacher workshop, and I was pretty happy that they invited us... I think there is kind of an expectation that [we] provide PD for teachers when asked.

One can conclude that not having an arts education coordinator may reduce the potential for funding, thus reducing the potential for equitable programming and limited options for increased success in teacher practice.

The Role of the Arts Education Coordinator

Arts education coordinators can serve districts in many capacities: a) advocating across departments for student access to programming; b) attending to the details of program implementation, sustainability, and assessment; c) ensuring teacher quality; d) ensuring instructional quality; e) fundraising to build or support programming; and f) acting as a resource to decision-makers. This gives them the opportunity to impact the district's programming in myriad ways. They have the rare ability to bridge between the central office and the school site, making transition smooth between policy and implementation. This may be the single most important impact from their work, as they facilitate plans into actions and assess outcome.

Influence On Scheduling

The building of programming is often dependent upon how many teaching specialists, classes or courses can be funded, how much and what type of instruction is provided, and to what extent scheduling can accommodate students. Scheduling is often an illusory component of access as it is usually not predictable across schools, districts, or states what with there being no identifiable standard. COA-1 points out that scheduling does not always make sense, saying:

[What] I've been told by my bosses is sometimes kids just have to make a choice... You're telling me you want this kid to drop out of something that they've been doing, that they loved, and ties them to all their friends... to do this one [other] class?"

Central offices of instruction do not usually concern themselves with the details of arts programming implementation at school sites, leaving that up to principals. In this regard, central office arts education coordinators are very valuable to school-based administrators as they can look at the challenges to scheduling districtwide and assist in problem-solving with the school site. COA-1 remarks that an out-of-classroom arts designee has “no weight against a principal or

another manager,” but that schools look to them to “get [principals] to understand what it is like to be a teacher that has to [set up an instructional] space, tear down a space, [and] drive their car to another space.”

For example, at the secondary level, it may not seem reasonable to schedule students first into their music class first and then schedule their English language class, following; after all, the English language class is the priority. But if you only have one music class offered and yet several English language classes available, it makes mathematical sense to schedule the music class *first* as there are multiple options for the English language class. It may seem like an easy decision to make, but for those not habituated in looking at this scenario in this manner, they may not even *consider* it.

At the elementary level, scheduling may prove a challenge as most grade K-1-2 teachers prefer not to impact their morning reading instruction. In this regard, it may be preferential to have grades 3-4-5 have their music in the morning as the construct of their reading instruction often varies from that of the K-1-2 grades. Additionally, for elementary schools whose content is integrated and who engage in project-based learning, the time of day is not as essential; much of the day’s content is integrated as opposed to being conducted in silos of instruction. Arts education coordinators are trained to take *all* instruction into account and see how it fits within the school’s plan.

Influence on Funding

As stated earlier, arts education coordinators are often tasked with garnering funding for the programs they oversee. COA-1 is also an arts education coordinator whose task it is to get funding, and they say, “I get those funds through my connections and people I work with every year.” In this manner, the quality of district programming can be commensurate with the success

of that personnel. In this study, all five participants of the focus group and one of the administrators interviewed, speak at length about their successes in raising money from the community and their worries that should they fail to get the money or donations equity will be impacted.

Arts education coordinators make comment on what happens to equity when programming diminishes due to the district funding cuts AEC-5 follows the money, saying:

What ended up happening was schools that were in neighborhoods that could afford to fundraise to hire [arts providers] continued to offer programs, and the Title I schools had nothing. Nothing. That happened for 17 years I think.

They can influence this outcome by keeping this information at the forefront of all decision-makers' minds during dialogue. With an arts education coordinator documenting and reporting data on access, one can point to the correlation of decreased funding and subsequential decreasing student access.

To illuminate the arts education coordinator's role via metaphor, this researcher propounds that the arts education coordinator acts as an ersatz Jiminy Cricket, the conscience of the district, reminding it to be aware of its own contribution, or lack thereof, in partnership to the monies gathered from the community, all in the name of what is the right and best thing to do for students: achieve equity. In Carlo Collodi's 1881 novel *Pinocchio*, none of the "small boys" want Jiminy Cricket to warn them not to go to Pleasure Island. Jiminy Cricket cautions them about the horrible things that can go wrong if they make that choice, the most important of which is losing their own self-identity; and yet they are seduced into going by the evil character Foulfellow, or "Honest John." Likewise, no administrator wants to be told that they must spend money on something they don't understand or recognize as valuable. They want the money for

what they want it for, and they don't need an arts expert reminding them about policy or standards or a student's social/emotional well-being, especially if it is potentially going to get in the way of something they *do* recognize as valuable. But we all know what happens on Pleasure Island, don't we? The "small boys" begin to see the ugly side of their poor decision and are turned into donkeys, losing their voices to hysterical braying.

This researcher uses this metaphor not to say that administrators who make inequitable decisions are but as donkeys, but rather as a way to say there are darker consequences for inequitable decision-making beyond no singing or drawing in elementary school for little kids. Participant AEC-3 is cautious trying to address the magnitude of the challenges faced by districts, saying:

Yeah. I think it's there on everybody's tongue, and I think people are watching it, but I think the barriers are bodies and dollars. You know, when you talk about equity, it's like sometimes I feel like we... I don't know...

An arts education coordinator may use their expertise to influence a decision-making body to make a more equitable decision on behalf of students, and that may be the most student centered way to be.

Influence on Quality Instruction

In this study, arts education coordinators imply that for instruction to be equitable, it must be of quality, and that quality is defined by certain hallmarks of instructional credibility. AEC-2 addresses the issue of the credibility of those who would provide instruction and how they teach it, stating:

It's just a problem in our district, the whole idea of, and this is an elementary problem, of dedicated art teachers versus the gen ed teachers. When we talk about

arts being core, then it really should be core, and then gen ed teachers should be teaching it. If a lot of the art teachers, then are saying... credentialed, dedicated art teachers, are saying well that's not art if it's not being taught by this dedicated art teacher. So, I don't know. I don't know if that is any answer.

As elementary arts education is core instruction, there is a natural assumption, for those who would teach it, that it is standards-based; but this is not necessarily so. COA-5 harkens to the time when the Common Core first came out, and this included the arts.

COA-5 remembers:

I know when common core came out, every Monday morning, every single person who had anything to do with teachers got together and we talked... It is about ultimately the students and instruction, and I think a frustration I sometimes have is that the instructional part [of the arts]... gets left until the end.

Most educators can agree that it is not in the spirit of equity to provide poor instruction to minoritized students. The 2000 court case *Eliezer Williams et al. vs. State of California* established that California would monitor that all students have access to the same, appropriate materials and supplies for instruction. This implies that the instruction itself must also be appropriate. Providing quality instruction is an attribute of pedagogical equity. Participant AEC-3 fights for professional development that has content integrity, relating a story about an arts integration professional development that did not meet a pedagogical standard, grumbling:

Back in 2012... everybody was talking about arts integration, but it was being... appropriated by non-arts people. I kind of said, pardon me but hell no. If you're going to do arts integration, let's get serious... and... let them know what real arts integration should look like.

All the arts education coordinators in the focus group agreed that, second to garnering funding, it was their primary task to ensure the quality of instruction. They believe this is one of the ways in which they influence equity for students. Arts education coordinators ensure quality instruction by providing professional development to elementary arts teachers and generalist classroom teachers alike. In some cases, they also provided professional development for the visiting artists-in-residence from within the community. Some arts education coordinators provide professional development not just on elementary arts standards but on strategies that are very supportive of STEAM instruction, project base learning, and arts integration across other content areas. School districts that have a strategic plan that includes elementary arts education or that have a BOE policy essentially provide a roadmap to arts education coordinators as to what they are to do. AEC-2 looks to the strategic plan for what to do next, saying: We have a strategic arts plan, and I oversee the implementation.” These two documents are important to elementary arts educator coordinators because this gives them the authority to engage in dialogue with others with plausible action steps in mind. Arts education coordinators are often administrators themselves and are very much aware of a district’s Local Control and Accountability Plan (LCAP) requirements along with the curriculum demands and advocacy issues in other content areas, and when that knowledge is partnered with pedagogic expertise in arts content areas, decision-making stands a greater chance of being equitable.

Respecting Arts Content Expertise

Secondly, arts education coordinators relate that they do feel respected by other content administrators as they collaborate with them, but they experience push back when they are having to press on a given issue. They fondly remember the deep instructional conversations they had in prior years to the pandemic of COVID-19, remarking that the quarantine all but

obliterated that opportunity. They express that, now, depending on the hierarchy within the Department of Instruction, they are often at the instructional table, feel their contributions are valuable to the conversation, but not so much when it comes to decision-making on district-wide concerns.

They admit a disappointment in their colleagues in that they do not have familiarity with the arts standards or acknowledge the fact that ESSA recognizes the arts as core content. AEC-5 laments conversation is more about policy; that “sometimes the instructional part of it gets left out” of group conversation. This can make it difficult to advocate for the arts in learning as not everyone in the dialogue has the same background knowledge or has a biased perspective of their own.

Lastly, arts education coordinators feel respected as an expert in their field and rejoice that they are seen as a resource to their colleagues. They report that they have authority to influence decision-making with adequate input to the instructional conversation until it becomes controversial; then they are asked to step back and the decision-making shifts to the assistant superintendent or the superintendent and the arts take a last-place position during considerations. Arts education coordinators are valuable as a resource as a content expert until that expertise is no longer in line with other decision-making. This collegiality is challenged when decisions are being made about funding, program cuts, or personnel. An arts education coordinator’s expertise in content and pedagogy once valued can become a barrier to another administrator’s goals when this expertise is sensible enough to warrant people making a different decision other than what the administrator wants, especially when it is backed up by a strategic plan or a BOE policy. The old “go-to” of cut the music teacher first doesn’t stand up in the face of research based evidence and overwhelming support from the community. Arts education coordinators admit to being

asked to step back and stay quiet when their expertise may sway the vote in favor of one program over another.

Summary

Districts that have an arts plan and an arts education coordinator to oversee implementation of the components of that plan stand a greater chance of having a sustainable and equitable implementation of elementary arts education in the schools. Yes, it is possible to achieve this without those two things when there is an administrator who want to have programming, but when that person retires, promotes, or moves to another district, the programming in the district no longer has an advocate for instruction; it can hang on the whims of whoever is in the position of decision-making. Arts education coordinators clearly have a positive influence on a school district's programming, especially when there is a plan to back them up.

Research Question #3

How do central office administrators and arts education coordinators/designees perceive the arts learning experiences of racially and economically minoritized elementary students?

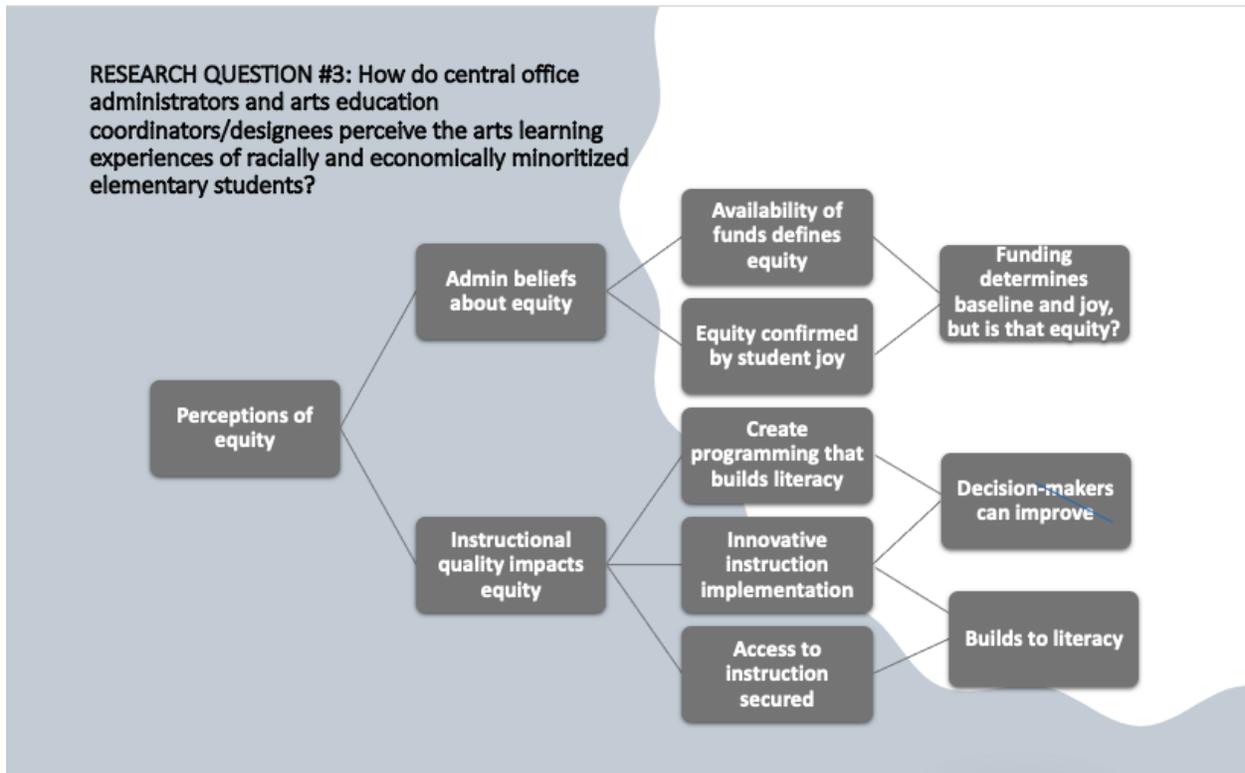
The central thematic domains discovered in this study revealed that when it comes to looking at elementary arts education through the lens of equity, any rubric of success administrators think they are being held to is not purposefully addressing how a system of injustice is affecting student access to education but is a biased opinion of whether students seem happy (see Figure 7).

The central office administrators participating in this research study referred to the experiences of minority, elementary-aged students mostly in terms of whether students are

seeming to enjoy themselves, stating they like seeing the students smile when they perform or see the parent interaction with their children at events.

Figure 7

Flowchart of Research Question #3: Perceptions of Equity



Date created: 2022

COA-5 refers to a lack of data to determine student achievement, admitting, “I guess we don't have a specific measure, but it's more of a subjective measure.” It is hopeful to note that when participants spoke about students at the secondary level, they did refer to an issue of equity, acknowledging the fact that limited access to rigorous coursework can impact whether a student has a viable pathway to college in the arts.

Does Joy Mean Equity for Elementary-aged Students?

All experiences that add to a perception are connected in some manner, so observing joy in students is not necessarily a bad thing, especially when we acknowledge the recent proliferation of research attributing gains in student social-emotional growth and engagement in school when engaging in joyful arts learning. Deep learning *is* joyful, but the achievement of joy looks different in different students. In a post-pandemic/quarantined world, many districts are coming around to the idea that the social-emotional welfare of students is vital to their accessing the curriculum and this is an issue of equity. Learning in and through the arts is often a joyful experience, and all participants in the study mention learning in the arts to be fun or joyful. Yet if we are to be accountable to instruction, measuring a student's joy as a measurement of success is a risky proposition; measuring that joy against whether it helped a student access curriculum is an even far dicier proposition. There are so many new programs meant to teach students about appropriate feelings and behaviors, however they may ring hollow when compared to engaging in an authentic, standards based learning experience through the arts. Perhaps it is better to measure a student's joy by creating an authentic learning environment and measuring their engagement and proficiency with the material in that environment. If they also smile, perhaps that is a bonus.

Some would point out that creating an environment of joyful learning can cost money, and that would be an understatement. Look how much it costs to sustain a football team! Yet football is something districts have figured out how to fund. This researcher would posit that if we can keep our football team, we can implement core content such as elementary arts education.

As previously stated, this study recognizes that the dominant conversation amongst research participants about equity for minority students revolves around funding, not necessarily

securing the equity that comes with quality instruction. It would seem central office administrators worry about a student's experience in so far as they have explicit funding to provide for that experience; funding is what determines the baseline, whether it's quality programming or not, and its value is often leveraged against other competing instructional initiatives. It is dispiriting to see how quickly arts instruction is let go of in the face of a budget challenge; it is even more dispiriting to come to grips with the consequences of loose accountability.

What Price Salvation Now?

In his 1905 play *Major Barbara*, George Bernard Shaw challenges the crony capitalism of arms dealing on behalf of saving the country as they enter a horrific, deadly war by asking his great socialist question, "What price salvation now?" The same can be asked of reducing funding for the arts in hopes of saving the money for some other district endeavor. At what cost is the saving of money siphoned away from deep elementary arts instruction that teaches, makes curricular connections, increases students' chances for employment and community engagement in life as well as brings joy? The price is very, very high indeed. The price is equity.

Incongruency Between Bias and Administrative Power in Decision-making

Central office administrators sit within the seat of power where decision-making occurs, the results of which can impact the entire manner in which equity is expressed in a district's institutional make-up. Critical race theory provides guideposts for examining what happens in the seat of power. Within this decision-making, the intersection of an administrator's personal bias, education, and habits of valuing content can all possibly add up to the potential for an inequitable decision if not purposefully guided. Mary McCauley of the Baltimore Sun reports on the intersectionality of race and gender in persons within institutions, pointing to Kimberle

Crenshaw who said, “If you don't have a lens that's been trained to look at how various forms of discrimination come together, you're unlikely to develop a set of policies that will be as inclusive as they need to be (McCauley, 2016, p. 18). Administrators have the power to provide or deny a student access to elementary arts education, and the incongruity between any bias, policy, and that power can mean the difference between a minoritized student having an education equitable with all other students or not.

But what if the challenge to equity wasn't about this amalgam of administrative characteristics, their power and decision-making practices, or even funding? What if it wasn't about *who* is making the decision at all? What if it was about how we focus and manage our *instructional practice*? What if it was about *how* we teach as opposed to whether *to* teach or *not* to teach at all.

Creating Equity

Accessible, Innovative, Quality Elementary Arts Instruction is Equitable Instruction

Quality, innovative elementary arts instruction that is equitable is researchbased. It is guided by data, standards, and policy. “Given that all states require some level of arts learning and ESSA’s inclusion of the arts and music as components of a ‘well-rounded education’ including arts measures somewhere within the accountability system is fair game” (Kisida et al., 2017, para. 19) especially where equitable decision-making is concerned. It can be delivered across curriculums taught by credentialed, single -subject or general education teachers and is enriched by extra-curricular experiences, perhaps provided by teaching artists. There is accountability to student outcome as it is relevant to a student’s life and the instruction is reusable, renewable, and applicable to other learning. Quality, innovative elementary arts learning adds up over time when a district plans for a vertical alignment of instruction K12 such

that it lays a foundation for future learning, making a student literate in artistic and personal expression and able to apply it to other content. This study asserts that administrators having knowledge of these characteristics can act as a ballast for equitable decision-making if they base their decisions on these precepts as opposed to a biased opinion about how students might be feeling. It also proposes that the place to start for laying a foundation for equitable learning is at the elementary level; that equity in the arts presupposes literacy in the arts is a goal.

Literacy in the Arts?

A simple analogy for how to lay a successful foundation for instruction beginning at the elementary level that adds up to literacy can be imagined if we look at professional National Football League (NFL) or USA Football (the national governing body for amateur football) as models for implementation. USA Football has a carefully crafted pathway that is “additive and necessary for ongoing advancement and growth of football” (Hallenbeck, Scott, USA Today Sports, 2017) to grow young athletes to either be able to compete in professional football or to be athletically fit and active as adults who also appreciate the work of professionals in the field, demonstrating this appreciation by purchasing tickets to the games. They do not wait until their players are young adults, put them into a high school or college football game to play with students weighing in at 275-375 pounds and then begin coaching them when they see that something needs to be fixed. Much like Major League Baseball (MLB) encourages T-ball for those as young as kindergarten-aged at neighborhood parks and recreation centers, the NFL and USA Football introduce basic football skills and concepts to children in Pee-Wee football leagues. Then they provide support to middle and senior high school athletic programs throughout the country. “The idea is to create a development pathway with the focus on ‘right age, right stage’” (Inzarelo, Nick, USA Today Sports, 2017) that builds to something greater.

The same—a “development pathway”—may be applicable to prepare students for the rigor of a CTE program in high school by introducing the basic skills and concepts within the arts standards at the elementary level and carry that through to the middle school. A two-year, high school CTE program that begins with introductory skills, alone, is not adequate to prepare a student for future collegiate study. Administrative decision-makers must have the forethought to lay the groundwork at the elementary level in anticipation of future student need.

Summary

Equity requires resolute attention; especially when it involves student access to elementary arts education. As an old friend of the researcher once said, “the arts don’t just happen from tea steam and fairy wing dust” (Richard Burrows, Personal communication, 2010). Administrators must plan for instruction with intent, purpose, and integrity and then implement instruction with the same.

Limitations Within the Data

There were three areas where access to data was either denied or not possible to organize. Fortunately, they were not so vital to the study as to stop data collection. At most, the researcher had to find other ways to cross-check what data was collected.

First, there was inconsistent data regarding research question #3 regarding equity in access for minoritized students. Perhaps it was the indirect manner in which the question(s) were written that kept respondents from getting more to the point. But the data, or the lack thereof, revealed important information about decision-making for elementary arts education, especially as regards accountability. Only one of the four school districts have a formal assessment plan in place to identify how much or what type of access students have to elementary arts education over time, but it should be noted that one district was in the early stages of creating an

assessment protocol. This may be due in part because districts, even those with intentional strategic plans in place, do not have consistent programming about which formal data collection might occur, nor do they have a formalized set of tools with which to conduct assessment. As a result, districts are unable to speak conclusively about the amount and quality of elementary arts education or about minoritized students' perceptions of their experiences.

There is limited information about collecting data on the many topics concerning arts education. This study's research demonstrates that internal assessment at the district level in and around the arts resembles unrelated snapshots from selective administrator experiences watching students perform, not necessarily reflecting intentional instructional planning or practice and this presents a challenge to issues of program sustainability. Administrators use their own, personalized experiences and feelings as a baseline of understanding, watching, albeit proudly, student productions as the tool for measurement to make conclusions about student access and achievement. It should be recognized, however, that this type of assessment by aggregating random personal, observational experiences and feelings on the part of administrators, while pedagogically unpredictable, is not without its merits in decision-making. Among other arts educators and researchers, there has been a dialogue regarding the measurement of outcomes. Authors have noted the shifts in research focus, describing a determination to measure the art experience itself and to avoid instructional indicators such as academic achievement to measure the value of studying an art type (Fleming, 2012; Winner & Hetland, 2000). Should the administrator be seeking to make connections in students' experiences--for instance, attempting to decide whether to fund a particular program--they may discover in their observations that wherever students receive sequential, quality instruction over time, perhaps from credentialed arts teachers, it will improve a student's life in art, increase their participation in school, and

perhaps, in their community over their entire educational life. It would be imperative, however, that administrators are able to recognize the characteristics of sequential, quality instruction over time. For those not in possession of that knowledge, especially when making group decisions about student access, they can at least dependably measure access by counting the minutes engaged in elementary arts education.

This does not mean, however, that central office administrators are not considering assessing their programming and its impact on students or that they do not care; in fact, this study demonstrates they are at least reflective about it. The good news is that their decision-making, while not formalized, rigorous, or unbiased is not necessarily absent and it impacts their decision-making.

Secondly, there was additional limitation in the collection of data about how instructional conversations occur in the central office as the researcher was unable to observe instructional cabinet Zoom meetings. Quarantine during the pandemic certainly opened up the opportunity to attend meetings on Zoom, but it also reduced the opportunities and comfort level for people to speak openly on a video screen. Instructional cabinet meetings are relatively protected meetings and require permissions for attendance be negotiated very high up the supervisory chain and well in advance. The researcher found this could take many months to organize and still not result in an observation. In fact, simply securing an interview with a single administrator was a carefully - crafted opportunity.

And lastly, as stated earlier, there were to have been five districts addressed but only four could be secured. As all the districts were similar in construct, the data that was collected was able to be cross-checked sufficiently with the four that participated. It is recommended that for a

differently-nuanced exploration on this paper's problem statement that this research be conducted with districts of a differing construct than these.

Implications for Policy and Practice

Improving Leadership in Decision-making

The central purpose of educational leadership is to provide students with a well-rounded education including the core content areas using innovative instructional practices that encourage equitable classrooms. Value theory, as explored in Chapter II, tells us that for something to be 'good simpliciter,' deemed good overall, we have to see it from multiple perspectives, and those perspectives will indicate value. Being aware of these multiple perspectives, some of which is their own perspective, is crucial for an administrator. Leaders should hold themselves to certain standards of accountability when making decisions about elementary arts education that include: a) continuity of focus upon issues of equity in access; b) attention to national, state, and local expectations; c) use of common assessment tools, language, and the use of standards; d) access to resources to improve decision-maker knowledge base; e) utilization of a bias-reducing protocol during decision-making; and f) utilization of data on elementary arts education to drive decision-making.

Seeking Out Resources to Aide Decision-making

Research has established there is a gap between the policies and accountability systems guiding elementary arts education programming (Landon & Russell, 2008), but this research is limited. "A persistent problem for arts education has been lack of research, and much of this has been due to a lack of data" (Kisida, et al., 2017); however, some districts and states are beginning to include data collection within their accountability systems (Para. 5). "Laying the groundwork to collect and report these data will go a long way toward identifying access and

gaps while also demonstrating that state policy makers value arts education” (para. 8). Collecting data that measures access to and the quality of elementary arts instruction requires use of standards based content language, thus potentially ensuring focused decision-making. This is crucial if administrators are to improve their practice and achieve equitable decision-making.

Implications for Policy and Decision-making Practice

The aggregated findings of this study imply that districts with a plan and an arts education coordinator stand a greater chance of having a sustainable program. Feedback from research participants indicates a singularity of need for complimentary policy and practice: the use of terms, knowledge, and language particular to the content when decision-making can impact equity in access to quality arts instruction for minoritized students.

Implications for Policy

While there are local, state, and national recommendations for appropriate programming that is standards based, the absence of explicit research at the elementary level implies limited accountability and expectation in decision-making for arts as core content at the elementary level. Policy is evident in ESSA and the California State Framework, but those policies are stated as recommendations. Even though ESSA recognizes the arts as core content, it does not mandate instruction. Therefore, it is important for districts to carve out their own policy regarding their expectation of instruction. This often takes the form of a strategic plan or a BOE policy statement about program goals and implementation strategies. Should a district require it, there are arts organizations in most states whose task it is to assist districts in creating such plans. There is also assistance from national arts organizations.

But it is not enough to have policy; the policy must have some pedagogical teeth, some traction, as it influences equity. It should be understood that data:

only inform[s] us about inputs...clearly signal[ing] some base level of resources as well as campus-level commitments and intentions, but they say nothing about the quality of programs... Outputs conversely, attempt to measure quality... As arts indicators become more common the right mix of measures will need to be negotiated between researchers, practitioners and policymakers. (Kisida et al., 2017, para 17.)

There must also be a plan of action attached, with purposefully-stated intentions and expectations for instruction, student outcome, and accountabilities. Additionally, there must be leadership and guidance to schools to support them in implementation. A policy with no teeth is not a policy; it is time wasted and merely words on a page. A good implementation plan with intentional oversight takes a lot of the guesswork out of the decision-making process and moves a district much closer towards equity.

Implications for Decision-making Practice

The literature review for this study revealed that there is quite a bit of historical and current research about decision-making in many fields of endeavor; research on Description Behavioral Decision Theory that deeply analyzes why and how people in leadership make their decisions. This study revealed that this type of scrutiny has rarely if ever been applied to decision-makers in central offices of instruction regarding elementary arts education. In fact, the decision-makers in the field of education, in practice, do not even speak in the parlance of the content when talking about arts instruction. How can we analyze something that is perceived as ephemeral by leaders, or even gather data about something not sustainable, under which the ground is constantly shifting? “Research that is more rigorous is needed to provide stronger evidence for arts education” (Wan et al., 2018, p. 4).

Recommendations for Improving Decision-making Practices

Improving the decision-making practice of central office administrators responsible for elementary arts education is implied by the data collected from the respondents of this study. The recommendations are:

- Ensure members of any decision-making group access research or possess knowledge about the nature of the decision by either having an arts education expert on the team or seeking out resources with expertise, such as the County Office of Education
- Ensure decision-makers are familiar with the policies and standards that surround the decision
- Refer to a policy or strategic plan to guide the dialogue
- Keep tenets of equity in the forefront of all decisions
- Keep the decision-making dialogue instructionally focused by using standardized language, expectations, and accountably focused on student outcome in the content
- Reveal bias in decision-making by utilizing a tool for analysis of the problem, such as a quadrant chart
- Utilize data collected about elementary arts programming, curriculum and instruction, and student access to inform future decision-making

Recommendations for Future Research

As stated previously, there is limited research about decision-making in central offices of instruction regarding elementary arts education. This study's exploration journeyed through unknown territory as it asked questions about how and why administrators make the decisions they do. It paid attention not only to what was said but also what went unsaid. The study begat many more questions for the researcher; here a few areas of potential research:

- Expand the exploration of the impact of arts education coordinators working in central offices upon the quality of instructional delivery and student access.
- Compare and contrast the impact to arts programming and student access between districts with a strategic plan and those without.
- Conduct a longitudinal study on the impact of student access to K12 arts education programming to a student's future participation in the arts, or in their use of their arts foundation across other fields of endeavor.
- Conduct a case study measuring the quality of instruction delivered by a credentialed arts teacher at the elementary level and its impact upon the overall educational programming of a school and its teachers.
- Conduct a case study comparing the delivery of elementary arts instruction by single-subject arts teachers, generalist elementary teachers, or artists-in-residence and documenting student proficiency levels.

This list is by no means exhaustive, but information from these topics would yield helpful information to the central office as it makes decisions on behalf of an entire district. Fortunately, there is much research being conducted right now looking at equity in the arts or at its value in the curriculum, but if that research never sees the light of day in the decision-making chamber, it doesn't help advocates and leaders make changes in equity for students. This researcher chooses to keep shedding the light on the locus of power in the central office as that is where the mission and vision of the district is constructed.

Concluding Statements

The findings from this study demonstrate that decision-making prioritization practices are far more complex and nuanced than the commonly expected rejoinders from school leaders as to

why elementary arts education is or is not implemented, such as: a) there's no money to fund it; b) there is no time in the instructional day; or c) there is no student or community interest. All of these are desultory responses lacking in palpable consideration with limited support in research. While personal bias is indeed a driving force behind the decision-making of the interviewed administrators, it is bias that indicates their surprising respect for the content and its value in the curriculum. But the deeper issues operating behind the consideration of arts education curriculum and instruction bear deeper scrutiny. Our students are our collective future and their diversity is our strength. We have a moral and national obligation to take this seriously and reflect upon our decision-making practices to ensure they are equitable especially for our racially and economically minoritized students of color.

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Appendix A

Thematic Literature Matrix

| AUTHOR | POLICIES AND REFORMS | | | | VALUE THEORY | | | | | CRITICAL RACE THEORY | | | DECISION-MAKING THEORY | | | | | | |
|---|---------------------------|-----------|---------------------------------------|-------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|-------------------------|------------------|------------|----------------------|--------|-------------|------------------------|-----------------|--------------------------|---------------------|-------------------------|-----------------------|---------------------------|
| | History of arts education | NCLB/ESSA | Impact of reduction in arts education | Arts as Core Curriculum | Devaluing of arts education | Benefits of arts ed for all | Benefits to Instruction | Social Emotional | Creativity | Innovation | Access | Entitlement | Accountability | Use of Evidence | Impact of Subject matter | Framing the Problem | Fear in Decision-making | Perceptions of Equity | Perceptions of leadership |
| Allina, B. (2018). The development of STEAM educational policy to promote student creativity and social empowerment. <i>Arts education policy review.</i> | | | X | | | | | X | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Burch, P., & Spillane, J. (2005). How Subjects Matter in District Office Practice: Instructionally Relevant Policy in Urban School District Redesign. | | | | | | | | | | | | | | X | | | | | |
| Castek, J., Schira Hagerman, M., Woodard, R. (2019). Principles for Equity-centered design of STEAM learning-through-making. 16. | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Catterall, J. (1999). Involvement in the Arts and Human Development. In E. B. Fiske (Ed.), <i>Champions of Change: The Impact of the</i> | | | | | X | | X | | | | | | | | | | | X | |

| | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|---|--|---|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|---|--|--|--|---|--|---|
| Eisenhardt, K. (1992). Strategic decision-making. | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Fiske, E. B. E. (1999). Champions of Change: The Impact of the Arts on Learning. | | X | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Harrison, E. F. (1996). A process perspective on strategic decision-making. <i>Management Decision</i> . | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | X | | X |
| Honig, M. I., & Coburn, C. (2008). Evidence-Based Decision-making in School District Central Offices. | | | | | | | | | | | | | X | | | | X | | X |
| Honig et al., (2010). Central Office Transformation for District-Wide Teaching and Learning Improvement. | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | X | | X |
| Hunter, M. A., April, A., Hill, A., & Emery, S. (2018). <i>Education, Arts and Sustainability: Emerging Practice for a Changing World</i> . | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Kowalski, T. J. (2008). <i>Data-driven decisions and school leadership: best practices for school improvement</i> . | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Kowalski, T. J., & Lasley, T. J. (2009). <i>Handbook of data-based decision-making in education</i> . | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |

| | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|---|--|---|---|---|--|--|--|--|--|---|---|---|--|---|---|--|---|
| Landon, J., & Russell, D. P. (2008). <i>Accountability in Arts Education: Building a Statwide System of Reciprocity.</i> | | | | | | | | | | X | X | | | | | | |
| Park, V., & Datnow, A. (2009). <i>Co-constructing distributed leadership: district and school connections in data-driven decision-making.</i> | | | | | | | | | | | | X | | X | | | |
| Rabkin, N., & Hedberg, E. C. (2011). <i>Arts Education in America: What the Declines Mean for Arts Participation.</i> | | | X | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Schoen, L., & Fusarelli, L. D. (2008). <i>Innovation, NCLB, and the Fear Factor: The Challenge of Leading 21st-Century Schools in an Era of Accountability.</i> | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | X | | |
| Shuler, S. (2012). <i>Core Music Education: Students' Civil Right</i> | | | | X | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Simon, H. A. (1982). <i>Models of bounded rationality.</i> | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Slovic, P., Fischhoff, B., & Lichtenstein, S. (1977). <i>Behavioral Decision Theory.</i> | | | | | | | | | | | | | | X | | | X |
| Zubrzycki, J. (2016). <i>Arts Learning Keeps Toehold in ESSA.</i> | | X | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |

Appendix B

Superintendent Request Letter (Email)

Email Subject Line: RESQUEST TO CONDUCT RESEARCH

11.14.20

Dear Superintendent,

I am requesting permission to conduct research in your district. Currently, I am a doctoral candidate in Education Leadership and Policy Studies at California State University Northridge. As part of the requirements for the degree, I am conducting research on central office administrator decision-making regarding elementary arts education implementation and curriculum. All data and information gathered would remain anonymous, and there would be no identifying material reported within my results.

My data collection would require:

- remotely interviewing instructional administrators, including arts-instructional administrators.
- a remote document review (i.e., scheduling of arts personnel, strategic planning materials, and meeting agendas).
- observing strategic planning meetings

Should you approve this request, please let me know with whom you would like me to communicate. I assure you I will be mindful of the time of your valuable staff.

I truly thank you for considering my request.

Be well,
Connie Covert
Doctoral Candidate
California State University Northridge
Dept of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies
connie.covert.805@my.csun.edu
818-203-9295

Appendix C

Gatekeeper Request Letter (Email)

11.14.20

Email Subject Line: ASSIST IN CONDUCTING RESEARCH

Dear Mr./Ms. Gatekeeper,

Hello. I hope all is well with you at this time My name is Connie Covert and I am a doctoral candidate conducting research in your district. Superintendent XYZ has given me your name as the contact person to assist me in gathering information for my research study.

My data collection would require remotely interviewing instructional administrators, remotely observing several virtual instructional meetings, and reviewing some of the internal organizational documents of your district, such as: a) budgeting documents, b) organizational charts, c) scheduling of arts personnel, d) strategic planning materials, or e) meeting agendas. Of course, I would like to be as unobtrusive as possible, and will remain respectful of your valuable time.

I would need you to help me gain access to one or more instructional meetings as an anonymous guest observer and perhaps have you provide documents to me or direct me to where I may access them. Additionally, I will need assistance in finding instructional administrators willing to participate in an anonymous interview with me.

Again, I would like to be as unobtrusive as possible, given I am conducting research, and you would be key in helping me to conduct the research in as discrete a manner as possible. Please let me know when I may contact you.

I truly thank you for your time reading this email. Please let me know a convenient time to contact you in the near future to discuss how to proceed?

Be well,
Connie Covert
Doctoral Candidate
California State University Northridge
connie.covert.805@my.csun.edu
818-203-9295

Appendix D

Administrative Interview Letter (Email)

11.14.20

Email Subject Line: INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE IN AN INTERVIEW

Dear Preferred Participant,

I am writing to invite you to take part in a dissertation study that I am conducting as a doctoral student at California State University, Northridge. My study explores the prioritization practices of administrators in decision-making for elementary arts education. Your superintendent has suggested that you might be interested in participating in my doctoral study.

As part of the study, I am remotely conducting interviews via the video-conferencing app ZOOM, with content administrators, directors of instruction, arts education coordinators, designees, and others.

In order to understand how arts education coordinators/designees influence decision-making, I wish to obtain participant opinions, perceptions, and understanding of what it is like being a part of decision-making that leads to developing, implementing, and sustaining elementary arts education programming in California's public schools.

The interview will be approximately 90 minutes in length. Responses in this dissertation will be confidential, and your name will not appear in the study.

If you would like to participate in the study, please contact me at: connie.covert.805@my.csun.edu, or 818-203-9295. I will be happy to discuss any questions you may have.

Participation in the study is voluntary. Thank you very much for your time considering my request.

Yours sincerely,
Connie Covert
Doctoral Candidate
Dept. of Educational Leadership & Policy Studies
California State University, Northridge

Appendix E

Organization Recruitment (Email)

11.14.20

Email Subject Line: RESQUEST TO RECRUIT RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

Dear Sir or Madame, President, Arts Organization ABC

I hope all is well with you at this time. It is good seeing you in the recent Zoom workshop sessions that Arts Organization ABC has been providing to the many arts teachers in the surrounding districts.

I hope you can assist me. Currently, I am a doctoral candidate in Education Leadership and Policy Studies at California State University Northridge. As part of the requirements for the degree, I am conducting research on central office administrator decision-making regarding elementary arts education. I was wondering if you would be so kind as to assist me in securing participants for my research.

My data collection would require remotely conducting a focus group of central office arts coordinators, designees, or persons acting in the capacity of arts advisor or consultant for their district. Of course, all data and information gathered would remain anonymous, and there would be no identifying material reported within my results.

Should you be amenable to my request, please let me know your requirements for going about recruiting participants from your organizational membership.

I truly thank you for your time reading this email and in considering my request.

Connie Covert
Doctoral Candidate
California State University Northridge
Dept. of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies
connie.covert.805@my.csun.edu
818-203-9295

Appendix F

Focus Group: Participant Invitation (Email)

11.14.2020

Email Subject line:

ARTS FOCUS GROUP ON ARTS EDUCATION COORDINATORS INVITATION

Dear Preferred Participant,

I am writing to invite you to take part in a dissertation study that I am conducting as a doctoral student at California State University, Northridge. My study explores the prioritization practices of central office administrators in decision-making for elementary arts education.

As part of the study, I am remotely conducting a focus group via the video-conferencing app ZOOM, with arts education coordinators and/or designees.

In order to understand what factors influence and impact decision-making, I wish to obtain participant opinions, perceptions, and understanding of what it is like being a part of decision-making that leads to developing, implementing and sustaining elementary arts education programming in California's public schools.

The focus group will be approximately 60 minutes in length. Responses in this dissertation will be confidential, and your name will not appear in the study.

If you would like to participate in the study, please contact me at: connie.covert.805@my.csun.edu. or 818-203-9295. I will be happy to discuss any questions you may have.

Participation in the study is **voluntary**.

Thank you very much for your time reading this letter and considering my request.

Yours sincerely,

Connie Covert

Doctoral Candidate

California State University, Northridge

Dept. of Educational Leadership & Policy Studies

818-203-9295

connie.covert.805@my.csun.edu

Appendix G

Interview Protocol: Central Office Administrators

OPENING QUESTIONS

1. Question Type: Background – general district information

Describe the district where you work

- Give no names
- Give size, number of students served
- Overall impression of academic achievement

2. Question Type: Background – professional capacity
Administrator role.

- What do you do there?
 - Is there a job description of your position in your district?
- What is it like in your office?
 - Where do you sit? Do you have a designated desk/ Access to a phone?
- Do people work under you? Do you have clerical assistance?
- For what duties are you responsible?
 - Describe your participation in content development and program management

INTRODUCTORY QUESTIONS

3. Question Type: Experience/Behavior
Prioritization

How do you decide what tasks to perform?

- Does anyone guide your work? Are you highly directed? Are you on your own?
- To what degree do you have the authority to make decisions on behalf of your district and implement those decisions?

4. Question Type: Experience/Behavior
Decision-making

What steps do you take when making a decision?

- What do you do when you don't know everything you need to know when making a decision?
- Do you seek resource from anyone?

5. Question Type: Feeling
Feelings and bias

How do you feel when a decision is made, and you don't agree with it?

- Do you speak up in a group when a decision is being made?
- How do you feel when a policy requires you make a decision a certain way and you don't agree with the policy?
- What actions do you take on the subject when you have those feelings?

TRANSITIONAL QUESTIONS

6. Question Type: Experience/Behavior

Think about a time when you were in an important memorable strategic planning meeting with other content administrators and directors of instruction when big decisions were being made about instruction. It can be about what programs to fund, how to roll out a new instructional program, anything; as long as it was strategic to your school district. Think of how you contributed to the decision-making of that group.

- Describe what was going on in that meeting.
- How did you behave? How did the other people behave? In what ways did you contribute to the overall conversation about instructional programming?

7. Question Type: Experience/Behavior

Think of a specific time when you were in a planning conversation with other central office administrators and the direction of the conversation included elementary arts education programming in your district.

- Where were you when you had the planning conversation?
- What was the circumstance behind the conversation?
- Was there a decision to be made?
 - How was a decision made?
 - Who made the ultimate decision?
 - Why and what was it made?

KEY QUESTIONS

8. Question Type: Experience/Behavior

Was there a time when you had to prioritize your options and make a decision regarding elementary arts education in your district but perhaps you felt you didn't fully understand either the policy, the pedagogy of the content, or the programming needs? How did you get the information to guide your decision-making?

- From what resources did you seek information and support?
- Did you have access to content specific guidance from another source than your own initiative?

9. Question Type: Feeling Question

How do you feel when you are engaging in an instructional conversation with other content administrators about elementary arts education?

- What of your perspective on elementary arts education do you contribute to the conversation?

10. Question Type: Experience/Behavior

Can you please describe how your district measures student access to and proficiency in arts education classes?

11. Question Type: Opinion/Value

Does your district supplant elective classes with English language development (ELD) classes until students reclassify out of ELD?

12. Question Type: Opinion/Value

What kind of arts learning do you think racially and economically minoritized students in your district experience?

- Is the instruction standards-based?
- Is it sequential?
- Does it lead to literacy in an art form?
- Is it taught by teachers credentialled in the content?

ENDING QUESTION

13. Question Type: Opinion/Value

In your ideal world, if you could have anything, what do you think would assist you in developing and implementing elementary arts education programming for your district? Is there anything you think I need to know?

Appendix H

Focus Group Protocol: Arts Education Coordinators/Designees

OPENING - Background

1. Tell me a little bit about your experience in the arts and arts education
Describe the characteristics of your district and the role you play
Describe where your office/desk is, and if you have a phone or clerical staff to assist you

INTRODUCTION

2. What expectations does your district have of your role in instruction?
How are those expectations communicated?

TRANSITION

3. Describe your participation in instructional conversation with other administrators in the Office of Instruction where decisions are made
 - a. Do you attend a regular instructional meeting or is it by selective invitations?
 - b. When you are in instructional meetings, how do you interact with other administrators? Are you called upon to present ideas or proposals?

KEY

4. In what ways does your district demonstrate its understanding of the value of the arts content in instruction? How aware are lead administrators of California State policies and expectations?
5. Describe ways in which your district prioritizes for elementary arts education. Include descriptions of implementation plans.
6. What significant program structures do you think lead to an increase in student access to elementary arts education? (district behaviors, administrator commitments, etc.)
7. How do you measure student access to programming?
 - a. Does your district keep data on access to arts programming and disaggregate by student populations?
8. What barriers to access do you see for racially and economically minoritized students in your district? Describe ways in which your district is addressing this.
9. Describe the impact your influence has on decision-making on student access to elementary arts education. How do you know?

ENDING

10. Beyond these questions, what issues in prioritizing for decision-making in elementary arts education do you think need to be present in Offices of Instruction?

11. What do you think needs further examination such that it might assist you, and perhaps others, in your work?

Appendix I

Document Review Checklist

Pseudonym Name of District _____

Date of Document _____ Distribution Style: Hardcopy Email Website

Title of Document _____

Author of Document _____

Role of Author: Superintendent Director of Instruction (or staff) (role _____)
Arts Education Coordinator Other Department (Name _____)

Document Type:

- ___ agendas
Type: ___ *C.O. strategic planning ___ content development ___ regular staff meeting
___ arts content teachers ___ non-arts teachers ___ C.O. inter-departmental
- ___ program implementation procedures
- ___ budgeting artifacts
- ___ elementary arts personnel schedule(s)
- ___ materials, equipment and supply accounting
Type: ___ purchasing records ___ instructional requests ___ procurement options
- ___ organizational chart
- ___ community outreach notices
- ___ instructional document
Type: ___ assessment ___ lessons ___ contextual ___ goals ___ goals/objectives

Document Tracking:

Central Office of Instruction Inter-Departmental School Distribution

| |
|--|
| <p>Purpose</p> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> |
| <p>Intended Outcome</p> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> |

Evidence of equity in access for all students: Yes No

* C. O. – Central Office

Appendix J

Descriptive Observation Question Guide

| SPACE | |
|---|--|
| Space | |
| *Describe the places where DoI's and Arts Crd.'s interact. | |
| Object | |
| How do documents used during SPM activities organize places? | |
| Activity | |
| How do SPM activities affect the places where they occur? | |
| Event | |
| How do events re/organize places where activities occur? | |
| Time | |
| What changes to the SPM places occur over time? | |
| Actor | |
| How do DoI's and Arts Crd.'s use places for SPM activities? | |
| Goal | |
| How do SPM goals relate to places where activities occur? | |
| Feeling | |
| What SPM places are associated with more frequent and intense feelings? | |

| DOCUMENTS | |
|---|--|
| Space | |
| Where do you find the documents that DoI's and Arts Crd.'s use? | |
| Object | |
| *Describe what DoI's and Arts Crd.'s use to interact | |
| Activity | |
| How are documents used in SPM activities? | |
| Event | |
| How are documents used in SPM's? | |
| Time | |
| How do DoI's and Arts Crd.'s use documents over time? | |
| Actor | |
| How do DoI's and Arts Crd.'s use documents to interact? | |
| Goal | |
| How are documents used to support SPM goals? | |
| Feeling | |
| How do documents used by DoI's and Arts Crd.'s evoke feelings? | |

| ACTIVITY | |
|--|--|
| Space | |
| Where do SPM's take place? | |
| Object | |
| How do SPM activities incorporate documents? | |
| Activity | |
| *Describe DoI's and Arts Crd.'s behaviors | |
| Event | |
| How are SPM activities and events related? | |
| Time | |
| How do SPM activities vary by time of day and week of semester? | |
| Actor | |
| What are the ways that SPM activities include DoI's/Arts Crd.'s? | |
| Goal | |
| How do SPM activities involve mtg. goals and objectives? | |
| Feeling | |
| How do SPM activities elicit feelings from DoI's/Arts Crd.'s? | |

| EVENTS | |
|--|--|
| Space | |
| Where do SPM's occur? | |
| Object | |
| How do SPM's incorporate documents that DoI's and Arts Crd.'s use to interact? | |
| Activity | |
| How do SPM's relate to what DoI's and Arts Crd.'s do in the mtgs.? | |
| Event | |
| *Describe DoI's and Arts Crd.'s participatory events | |
| Time | |
| How do SPM' occur over time? Is there a sequence to the mtgs.? | |
| Actor | |
| How do DoI's and Arts Crd.'s participate in strategic planning mtgs.? | |
| Goal | |
| How do SPM' relate to SPM goals and activities? | |
| Feeling | |
| How do events shape feelings of DoI's and Arts Crd.'s? | |

| TIME | |
|--|--|
| Space | |
| How does time affect where SPM activities and events occur? | |
| Object | |
| How does time of day, week, month, semester affect documents used? | |
| Activity | |
| When do most SPM activities occur? | |
| Event | |
| *Describe DoI's and Arts Crd.'s participatory events | |
| Time | |
| How do DoI's and Arts Crd.'s act when together? | |
| Actor | |
| How do DoI's and Arts Crd.'s participate in SPM's together? | |
| Goal | |
| When is most progress on SPM goals and objectives achieved? | |
| Feeling | |

| ACTOR | |
|---|--|
| Space | |
| Where do DoI's and Arts Crd.'s place themselves during activities? | |
| Object | |
| How do DoI's and Arts Crd.'s use documents? | |
| Activity | |
| What do DoI's and Arts Crd.'s do as part of the SPM? | |
| Event | |
| How are Arts Crd.'s and DoI's involved in strategic planning mtgs.? | |
| Time | |
| How do DoI's and Arts Crd.'s change over time? | |
| Actor | |
| *Describe Who participates in SPM activities and events? | |
| Goal | |
| How are DoI's and Arts Crd.'s connect to SPM objectives? | |
| Feeling | |
| What do DoI's and Arts Crd.'s feel as a result of SPM interaction? | |

| GOAL | |
|-------------------------------|--|
| Space | |
| Where are SPM goals achieved? | |

| | |
|---|--|
| Object | |
| How do documents used in the SPM support strategic planning mtg. goals and objectives? | |
| Activity | |
| How do SPM activities support mtg. goals and objectives? | |
| Event | |
| How are strategic planning mtgs. behaviors related to mtg. goals and objectives? | |
| Time | |
| How do strategic planning mtg. goals and objectives change over time? | |
| Actor | |
| How do strategic planning mtg. goals and objectives affect DoI's and Arts Crd.'s? | |
| Goal | |
| *Can you describe the goals of strategic planning mtg. activities and events | |
| Feeling | |
| How do strategic planning mtg. goals and objectives elicit feelings of DoI's/Arts Crd.'s? | |

| | |
|---|--|
| FEELING | |
| Space | |
| Where are SPM goals achieved? | |
| Object | |
| How do DoI's and Arts Crd.'s feelings relate to the use of documents? | |
| Activity | |
| How do Admin and DoI's feelings affect SPM activities? | |
| Event | |
| How do Admin and DoI's feelings affect SPM activities? | |
| Time | |
| How does time affect Admin and DoI's feelings about the SPM | |
| Actor | |
| How do feelings influence Arts Crd.'s and faculty? | |
| Goal | |
| How do feelings influence SPM goals and objectives? | |
| Feeling | |
| *Describe DoI's and Arts Crd.'s feelings during interaction | |

KEY:

DoI – Directors of Instruction Crd. – Arts Education Coordinator

*Bolded topics indicate descriptive responses required

(Revised from Spradley, J. P., 1980)

Appendix K

Adult Consent Form

California State University, Northridge CONSENT TO ACT AS A HUMAN RESEARCH PARTICIPANT

Prioritization Practices in Central Office Administrative Decision-Making for Standards-Based Elementary Arts Education in California

You are being asked to participate in a research study conducted by Connie Covert as part of the requirements for the Ed.D. degree in Educational Leadership. Participation in this study is completely voluntary. Please read the information below and ask questions about anything that you do not understand before deciding if you want to participate. A researcher listed below will be available to answer your questions.

RESEARCH TEAM

Researcher:

Connie Covert

Michael D. Eisner College of Education
Department of Education Leadership and Policy Studies
ED 3121
18111 Nordhoff St.
Northridge, CA 91330
(818) 677-2590
connie.covert.805@my.csun.edu

Faculty Advisor:

Dr. Ellen Edeburn
Department of Education
18111 Nordhoff Street
Northridge, CA 91330
818-677-2526
ellen.edeburn@csun.edu

PURPOSE OF STUDY

The purpose of this qualitative study is to investigate administrative prioritization practices in decision-making of central office administrators and arts education coordinator/designees who are responsible for the implementation and curriculum of a standards-based arts education program in elementary schools.

SUBJECTS

Inclusion Requirements

You are eligible to participate in this study if you:

- (1) work in the central office of instruction of a school district implementing some type of programming in elementary arts education.
- (2) hold some accountability for decision-making and over-sight of elementary arts education in your district

Time Commitment

This study will involve approximately 60 minutes of your time.

PROCEDURES

The following procedures will occur. You will either participate remotely via Zoom in:

- (1) a focus group, or
- (2) an individual interview

RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS

This study involves no more than minimal risk. There are no known harms or discomforts associated with this study beyond those encountered in normal daily life.

BENEFITS

Subject Benefits

You may not directly benefit from participation in this study.

Benefits to Others or Society

This study examines the perspectives of central office instructional administrators and arts education coordinator/designees as they prioritize decision-making as regards elementary arts education. Thus, the results of this study may shed light on influences on administrative decision-making that impact student access to elementary arts education. This may benefit all stakeholders by improving the context in which decision-making occurs. Additionally, it may provide information to further future research on the topic by contributing to the growing body of work on increasing student access to elementary arts education.

ALTERNATIVES TO PARTICIPATION

The only alternative to participation in this study is not to participate.

COMPENSATION, COSTS AND REIMBURSEMENT

Compensation for Participation

You will not be paid for your participation in this research study.

COST

There is no cost to you for participation in this study.

WITHDRAWAL OR TERMINATION FROM THE STUDY AND CONSEQUENCES

You are free to withdraw from this study at any time. **If you decide to withdraw from this study, please notify the researcher immediately.**

CONFIDENTIALITY

Subject Identifiable Data

All identifiable information that will be collected about you will be removed and replaced with a code. A list linking the code and your identifiable information will be kept separate from the research data.

Data Storage

All research data will be stored electronically on a secure network (MyCSUN box) with password protection. The audio/video recordings will also be stored on a password-protected laptop in a secure location in the researcher's home office, accessible only by the researcher; then transcribed and erased at the end of the study.

Data Access

The researcher and faculty advisor named on the first page of this form will have access to the study records. Any information derived from this research project that personally identifies you will not be voluntarily released or disclosed without your separate consent, except as specifically required by law. Publications and/or presentations that result from this study will not include identifiable information about you.

Data Retention

De-identified records in the form of transcriptions will be maintained on the password-protected laptop of the researcher during the period in which findings from the study will be disseminated. The researcher intends to keep the research data until the research is published and/or presented and then it will be destroyed.

MANDATED REPORTING

Under California law, the researcher is required to report known or reasonably suspected incidents of abuse or neglect of a child, dependent adult or elder, including, but not limited to, physical, sexual, emotional, and financial abuse or neglect. If any researcher has or is given such information in the course of conducting this study, she may be required to report it to the authorities.

IF YOU HAVE QUESTIONS

If you have any comments, concerns, or questions regarding the conduct of this research please contact the research team listed on the first page of this form.

If you have concerns or complaints about the research study, research team, or questions about your rights as a research participant, please contact the Research and Sponsored Programs office, 18111 Nordhoff Street, California State University, Northridge, Northridge, CA 91330-8232, by phone at (818) 677-2901 or email at irb@csun.edu.

VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION STATEMENT

This study has moved to an online consent process to comply with applicable state and local regulations intended to reduce COVID-19 transmission, and to reduce risks to study participants. You should not sign this form unless you have read it and been given a copy of it to keep.

Participation in this study is voluntary. You may refuse to answer any question or discontinue your involvement at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you might otherwise be entitled. Your decision will not affect your relationship with California State University,

Northridge. Your signature below indicates that you have read the information in this consent form and have had a chance to ask any questions that you have about the study.

I agree to participate in the study.

- I agree to be audio recorded**
- I do not wish to be audio recorded**
- I agree to be video recorded**
- I do not wish to be video recorded**

Participant Signature

Date

Printed Name of Participant

Researcher Signature

Date

Printed Name of Researcher