Being visually impaired in an elementary art classroom: a case study

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BEING VISUALLY IMPAIRED IN AN ELEMENTARY ART CLASSROOM: A CASE STUDY

by
Kristina Benton

A Thesis
Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the Masters in Subject Matter Teaching: Art Degree of The Graduate School at Rowan University May 8, 2007

Approved by Advisor

Date Approved 5/8/07

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ABSTRACT

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Being Visually Impaired in an Elementary Art Classroom:
A Case Study
2006/07
Dr. Rick Dammers
Masters in Subject Matter Teaching: Art

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the experiences of a visually impaired student during art instruction. The data was collected using observations of the subject during art class and a series of one-on-one interviews. The subject of the study was a male, second grade, visually impaired student. His optical disorder is known as Micro-Opthalmia/Cataract Syndrome and is a rare condition. Data was interpreted using coding and transcription based on the themes that developed throughout the course of the study. The findings of the study were (a) that the subject has a high level of self-esteem and view of himself as an artist despite his disorder, (b) he has a unique way of adapting to lesson and techniques that have been introduced, (c) his aide and teachers make modifications that are unintentional or specific to his IEP, and (d) the high level of assistance given affects the authenticity of his artwork.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I'd like to begin by thanking those 17 little people who make a difference in my life everyday. Without them striving to do their best, I don't know if I could have done mine with partial sanity. I would also like to dedicate this paper to all those in my thesis class; all two of them; Suzanne and Bill. Thank you for being a great support group. We all really needed it this past year. And Dr. Dammers...a big thanks to you too.
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CHAPTER ONE

An Introduction to the Study

This case study is divided into five chapters. Chapter One addresses the specific need for the study and includes a description of the subject as well as the methodology for conducting the study. Chapter Two explains the procedures of qualitative research interviewing according to Stake (1995) and Kvale (1996). In addition, it provides an overview of the laws pertaining to educating blind and visually impaired students. Chapter Three includes a description of the setting for the study and a typical day in the art room. The interview and observation schedules have also been provided. Chapter Four describes the findings and themes exposed in Chapter Three and how they addressed the initial research questions. Chapter Five concludes the study with the need for further research and suggestions for teaching visually impaired students.

There are many studies of students with special needs in regular education classrooms. There are resources for how to teach these students and ensure that their instruction is an appropriate fit for their needs. However, there are few case studies on blind or visually impaired students; especially in art. Therefore, a case study has been conducted to explore the experiences of a visually impaired, elementary student, in an art classroom. The findings of this study provide a better understanding of how visually impaired students experience art class and may offer insight to improve means of instruction.

A qualitative study allows for insight of this subject matter despite not having a visual impairment. This study describes a student’s visual impairment as well as explores how he adapts to the current art curriculum. The observation and interview processes
visually impaired, elementary school student. The subject, known to this study as Bobby, is a student participating in the visual arts with very little of the art curriculum being three-dimensional. I have observed his frustrations and feelings toward art for having a limited visibility of the teacher’s demonstrations.

This study began with these initial lines of inquiry: What are Bobby’s feelings toward art? Does he like it? What frustrates him? Do his feelings change during certain projects? What are his likes and dislikes? How does he interpret the skills without clearly seeing the art teacher’s demonstration? What modifications do the one-on-one aide and the art teacher make? How does he compensate compared to the other students in his class? What does he do differently? Does his limited sight affect his creativity and interpretation? Where is his location in the art room? What colors can he “see” easily? What colors does he tend to gravitate toward? Does Bobby critique his work? If so, how? How does he view himself as an artist? How does he describe his successes? Does he feel he accomplishes the skill that was introduced? What is Bobby’s favorite medium to work with? What medium is “easier” for him to manipulate?

The questions were a starting point for what I planned to have answered by the end of the interview/observation process. I am sensitive to the fact that these questions led to a series of others and that I have explored the subject’s experiences as a whole. These questions are what I have specifically prepared with the subject in mind. I have collected other background information through interviewing his parents, classroom and art teachers, and classroom aide. They are further discussed in Chapter Three and the data collected and emergent themes have been discussed in Chapter Four.
Through the use of interviews and observations, I hoped to discover Bobby’s feelings toward art. These forms of data collection were necessary to better understand Bobby and have a clearer sense of his experiences. I was also able to view his body language and tone in certain situations. Uncovering his frustrations, abilities, drive, and attitude toward the art program were beneficial as well. It allowed for a view of how he interpreted the art teacher’s instructions thus leading to the final product. I have reviewed how his Individualized Education Program (IEP) specifically deals with art. It has also been noted how the subject responds to the modifications according to the IEP.

In addition, I have explored his preference of color and media. I wanted to understand why he selects those specific colors/media and if it is because he sees them more clearly. I have also taken note of how the subject critiques his own work and how he feels about his sense of accomplishments. I have discussed a lot of his past work with him and covered what he remembered when creating them.
When I first contacted his parents, by phone, to ask for initial permission and explain the purpose of my study, Bobby’s mother, known to this study as Sharon, was the primary source of providing background information. She was very cooperative during the course of the study. She has a warm and positive personality and was at ease with any questions I posed. I found her fascinating. Sharon, initially having limited sight, is now completely blind and assuming that eventually Bobby will be. As a child she underwent corrective surgeries that were unsuccessful. When we spoke on the phone, she shared her own elementary school experiences. She spoke of managing to get a good education on her own, despite not having an aide. She mentioned how she survived school with very little help. She described her experiences as influencing the rational for her style of parenting. Since she knows what it is like to be a visually impaired child, she had a lot to share. In her adult life, she currently works for the Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired.

Bobby attended the same school I teach at in New Jersey. I have worked with Bobby’s classroom teacher, one-on-one aide, art teacher, and building principal to work out scheduling conflicts and allow times for interviewing and observing him. He has art on Tuesdays from 9:45am to 10:25am. I observed him four times during this formal art instruction. Since we did not have the same daily schedule I interviewed him while my class was having Spanish or recess and he was finished his class work. He did not miss regular classroom instruction time or Braille lessons during our time together.
The Subject

Bobby, is a white, seven year-old, visually impaired, male, in second grade. He is about four feet tall, and has a thin build. He has straight, dirty blonde hair. He wears glasses with lenses about one centimeter thick, and his vision is 20/800. Bobby is only able to see out of the bottom left quadrant of his left eye. Although his is not completely blind, he is viewed as having “poor sight”. However, according to his mother Sharon, his mobility is average. He rides his bike and can get around himself with little to no assistance.

The specific name of his condition is Micro-Ophthalmia/Cataract Syndrome. There are three symptoms of this optical disorder. The first one being which the word itself means, having “unusually small eyes”. Secondly, cataracts grow on the eye as a form of protection. Thirdly, a person with this condition has misshapen irises. Bobby’s parents were not aware it was a genetic condition until after he was born and Bobby has a 50% chance of passing it to his own children in the future. Despite the fact that it is a dominant gene, Bobby’s younger sister does not have any signs or symptoms of the cataract disorder.

Micro-Ophthalmia/Cataract Syndrome is a rare disease. There are roughly 22 documented cases in the world. Having the opportunity to work with a child with this disorder was indeed both a privilege and unique learning experience. From birth, Bobby was an interesting case study to doctors. However, shortly after being part of many studies as a baby, his mother ended the research on her son. She did not want him to spend his childhood being part of endless studies and experiments. However, surprisingly enough, Sharon did not appear to be against her son participating in my study.
Sharon compares her son’s experiences to those of completely blind children. She said that Bobby uses the limited vision he has unlike most visually impaired people who rely solely on their other senses. She feels it is a good stimulus for him and she is glad he uses it (Appendix D p. 71). His mother feels she handles things differently as far as guiding him socially. In her opinion, most parents of visually impaired children focus too much on academics. As previously mentioned, his limited sight does not physically hinder Bobby. Letting him go play outside with his friends and hop on his bike and ride around with friends, might seem careless, but she makes sure he is safe and encourages typical kid activities. Bobby’s social life is very important to her. She feels he needs to have experiences any other kids would have if she expects him to make friends, date, and get married some day. She wants him to be as well rounded as possible. Other than for obvious reasons, Bobby’s mother never implied that his vision would be a hindrance to living a “normal” life. When I commented on how he relates to adults, she joked that she is realistic that “maturity wise he can go from 12 years old to about two in one second” (p. 71).

When Bobby was asked how he describes his vision he explained that he is not colorblind and that he can see all the colors. After talking with his aide Joan, she said it was just shared that a classmate of his is colorblind and he was discussing the fact that he isn’t with his mother. Therefore, that topic was still fresh in his mind. He also shared that his right eye makes everything darker. He went on to explain that his left eye is better and it’s the one he “focuses on”. He uses his left eye since he is completely blind in the right one. He explained that he has worn glasses for the past two years. He was at ease with discussing his vision.
During one of our meetings Bobby and I discussed one of his stories and the illustration he made to go with it (Figure 1). His classroom teacher told the class to write about what they would do if they were President. Bobby’s story was typed in Braille and Joan wrote above his symbols to translate. His story read:

If I were president I would make laws like no drinking in cars. Another thing I’d need to do is explore the White House. It is always important for me to know how to get around. Also I would help fight to end the war in Iraq. I think it would be cool to be president; don’t you? (Appendix D p. 68)

Figure 1 The White House Story and Illustration

I was curious and asked him what he meant by it being important to explore the White House. His response was immediate; “Because when visually impaired and visually impaired people need certain things to know how to get around. And if you don’t
know a place or go to a place, it might be harder to get around” (p. 68). The questions that followed asked him what he does to help himself get around. He explained that he has his ability instructor and glasses to help him see well. When I asked about his aide helping him he confidently explained that she does help, but he knows this building so he does not have a difficult time getting around.

At this point in his life, Bobby’s limited vision does not seem to be hindering him mobility-wise, socially, or academically. Although assistance is provided for him, he is very capable and independent. He carries out his school duties just as expected. He leaves the classroom very little with the exception of Braille instruction a few days a week. Bobby participates in all of the specials provided although instruction may be slightly modified.
CHAPTER TWO

Legalities and Cited Research

At the elementary level students generally participate in specialty area courses such as physical education, art, music, library, computers, etc, in addition to their core classes. Many students with special needs are mainstreamed into specialty area classes. Thus, students of all levels and abilities are offered the opportunity to explore, experience, and create alongside their classmates. Specialty area teachers develop a means of reaching these students according to their IEP, allowing opportunities for success. These students with certain impairments may have the assistance of a one-on-one aide or be able to compensate for their disability on their own.

The U.S Department of Education issued a Notice of Policy Guidance to address the requirements of Part B of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), directly applying to the education of blind and visually impaired students. The children who are provided with services under Part B due to blindness or visual impairments are incredibly diverse. This population displays a range of vision difficulties and varying adaptations to vision loss. Public Law 105-17 defined public agencies’ responsibilities in educating blind and visually impaired with two important ideals. It provides that IEP teams are required to make provision for instruction in Braille and the use of Braille for blind and visually impaired students, unless, based on relevant evaluations, the IEP team determines that instruction and/or use of Braille is not necessary (2001).

The reauthorization of the IDEA Amendments of 1997 has led to greater educational opportunities for students with visual impairments (Journal of Visual
Impairments and Blindness, 2002). However, not much has been noted concerning visually impaired students and specialty area classes.

This chapter covers the procedures of a qualitative research interview based upon the suggestions of Kvale (1996) and Stake (1995). The findings of these two researchers have provided the framework and schematics for the case study. According to Kvale (1996), the qualitative research interview attempts to understand the world from the subjects’ point of view, to unfold the meaning of peoples’ experiences, to uncover their lived world prior to scientific explanations. I followed Kvale’s definition of a qualitative interview by interpreting how Bobby perceives art class, his feelings toward art, and his experiences that support these ideas.

Kvale views conversation as research. It is through engaging in conversation that we are able to understand the life experiences people have encountered and how they interact with the field around them. He stated that an interview is not a normal conversation between two equal partners, but one where the interviewer controls the situation and the direction of the conversation. The interviewer is also to introduce the answers to questions and critically follow up if they relate to the topic at hand. He or she is to establish a setting where the subject feels secure enough to freely discuss experiences and feelings. With these thoughts in mind, there is no common procedure for a qualitative interview. This lack of having standard rules available may cause the researcher to encounter some difficulties.

Seven method stages for an interview investigation have been selected. They are: thematizing, designing the study so it addresses the research questions and treats both knowledge construction and moral implications, interviewing, transcribing, analyzing,
verification, and reporting. In addition, there are also a few aspects of qualitative research interviews that specifically relate to this case study: life world, meaning, deliberate naiveté, and positive experience. The life world aspect is when the topic of the interview is the every day life of the interviewee and his relation to it. I have observed how Bobby reacts during art instruction. I took into consideration the factor of his relationships with his classroom teacher, art teacher, one-on-one aide and peers. Observing him surrounded by sighted people and how he adapts to his situation was key.

Meaning is when the interview identifies the central themes in the life world and interprets the meaning of what is said and how it is said. It is how the subject reacts to his or her surroundings. During this time I have noted Bobby’s feelings toward art and any frustrations he might have encountered. I also observed tone toward his artwork, ability, and the assistance of his aide.

Deliberate naiveté is when the interviewer demonstrates openness to new and unexpected phenomenon rather than having ready-made schemes of interpretation. Since, as the researcher, I had little prior knowledge of the experiences of a visually impaired student and art, I was open to the experience as a whole. In addition, I used the background provided by Bobby’s mother, teachers, and aide to create my interview questions.

Finally, the positive experience aspect may allow for the interviewee to obtain new insights into his life situation. I hoped that through this experience Bobby would thrive on his acceptance as an artist.

Kvale also addresses the ethical guidelines for interviewers when conducting human research. Informed consent enlightens the subject of the reason for the study and
any potential risks and benefits from participating. The subjects are also made aware that their participation is voluntary and they may withdraw at any time. Ensuring confidentiality prevents identities of subjects from being reported, and, or any identifying features will be changed. Any consequences need to be addressed with respect to possible harm to the subject as well as the expected benefits of participating in the study. Bobby, his parents, teachers, as well as classmates, were given consent forms (Appendix A-Consent Forms). All of those participating or contributing in any way were made aware of the nature of the study. They were informed that there could be a minimal risk by being involved and any responses recorded would be confidential and their identities protected.

The researcher, during the interview process, is required to be sensitive to each ethical issue as they arise and are responsible to act responsibly in regard to such issues. Many ethical issues may be avoided when selecting a case to research. According to Stake (1995), a case should be chosen that could maximize what we can learn. It should be one that leads us to understanding and assertions. It should be easily obtainable and the subjects should be cooperative. If in the early stages this does not seem feasible, the case should be dropped and another selected. Fortunately, Bobby’s mother was very cooperative from the time I initially approached her. Since there was a limited sample population and Bobby is one of the two visually impaired students in the school district, obtaining his and his family’s permission was important in order to have the study take place.

Once data has been obtained, transcription is necessary to make sense of what has been said and to see how it directly relates to the study. Kvale said that the interviewer’s
active listening and remembering might ideally also work as a selective filter, retaining those very meanings that are essential for the topic and the purpose for the study (1996). In Bobby’s case, I was able to control the interviews with redirecting questions to keep him on task to the topics at hand. Questions were used to build background, create a comfortable interviewing environment, and collect data. I recalled occurrences from previous interviews and observations to discuss and reflect on key events.

When making the shift from speech to text, difficulties can arise in the transcription. Problems can be caused if there is more than one transcriber. Each transcriber may have his or her own interpretation deciding where a sentence ends, distinguishing pauses by the interviewee, or interpreting body language and comments to interview questions. When words are translated from one person’s language to another, meaning can also be misinterpreted or missed completely. To increase reliability and validity the first basic rule is to be sure to state explicitly how transcriptions were made. This will allow for a more adequate interpretation. When Bobby was interviewed, all of the conversations were tape-recorded. This allowed for the meetings to be replayed as necessary and allow ample time for decoding. Any extra information such as body language, reactions, and environmental influences were recorded in field notes, and then transcribed.

Deciding whether transcriptions should be verbatim or a more formal style depends on the audience it is intended for. The interviewer must decide how the interviewee would want to be portrayed and have their statements written. This leads into the issue of ethics. According to Kvale (1996), posing sensitive topics to interviewees may bring forth responses where it is important to protect confidentiality. Some subjects
may even experience shock as they read their own interview and they may become offended. If this is the case, transcripts should be written in a more formal style. In order for the transcripts to be applied to the study, the data must be coded. In this case, there are times in the study when direct quotes from both Bobby and his mother were necessary. Most of the other information was paraphrased. The data collected was coded according to four emergent themes that are addressed in Chapter Four.

Coded Data

Coding of the data can be done manually or by computer. Computer based programs categorizes relevant passages then with a code-and-interview program, the passages can be looked at and inspected with options of recoding and combining codes. This also allows for theory building. Coded data assists when organizing work. It is readily available to be retrieved at applied to the emergent themes. For the initial findings from the study, the Hyper-Research software program was used and the remainder was done manually.
CHAPTER THREE
Experiences and Descriptions
The Art Experience

I have examined the experiences of Bobby as he participated in art class. Through observations and interviews I was able to understand Bobby’s feelings toward art and how he interacts with his life world. This chapter recalls authentic experiences observed from January 30 through February 20, 2007.

Bobby has art on Tuesdays for a forty-minute block from 9:45am to 10:25am. With the school day officially beginning at 9:30am, this is the first scheduled period of the day. After settling in, listening to announcements, and completing morning work, Bobby and his classmates head down the hall to the art room wing.

The Art Room
The art room is in the same wing as the music and Spanish classrooms. It is located at the end of the hallway. When you enter, you are immediately in the front of the room. In the front there are chalkboards with bulletin boards on either side; all filled with student work and examples of the skill/project for the day. There are roughly 24 desks facing the front of the room that are for the students. The desks are grouped in twos or threes and arranged in rows. Each desk has a number on it, a drawer with a pencil and an eraser, and a stool pushed underneath. The desk’s surface can easily be propped up to resemble an easel.

On either side of the room there are sinks for rinsing supplies and easy cleanup. There is also a walk-in closet for the art teacher’s supplies. The shelves are filled with
colorful stacks of paper, bottles of paint, bins of brushes, etc. His desk is in the back of the room with a few bookshelves. The room itself receives a lot of natural light since it has windows all along the back wall. On the window shades are posters demonstrating principles of art such as line, shape, movement, and form. In the back, there are also long tables for additional workspaces with bins of markers and crayons. In the back, right corner there is a teacher workstation with rolls of bulletin board paper and the laminating machine. Occasionally a teacher or a teacher’s aide comes in to cut paper or laminate something.

The floor is an arranged pattern of linoleum squares in pastel colors and the ceiling is a drop ceiling. Students from years past have painted several of the ceiling tiles. There are also three, large, fabric dragonflies suspended from the ceiling. Each dragonfly is about three feet in length.

The Art Teacher

The art teacher, known to this study as Jon, has created a positive workspace for young artists. Jon is one of the few males in the school along with the gym teacher and principal. He is in his fifties and is approximately five feet, ten inches tall. He wears glasses and has a medium size build. Jon will almost always greet you with a wave or a smile when you see him in the hall.

After speaking with his past and present students, he is just as much admired now as he was 25 years ago. He is a soft spoken, kind hearted, and dedicated teacher whose nurturing tone can make every child feel like an artist. Jon teaches students various art skills and when they ask style related questions he simply replies, “You’re the artist” allowing students to take ownership of their work.
Jon is a hands-on teacher. He will begin his lessons with an overview of the history of an artist or famous artwork and the technique used. He then shows an example and demonstrates what the students are to do on the board. As they are working, he is constantly going to each child’s desk to check their progress, to keep them on track, or to offer a positive remark.

A Typical Day in the Art Room

By 9:40am I was already in the art room when Bobby, his aide, known for this study as Joan, and the other students filed into the room. My plan was to get there a little early so Bobby would not be aware of me being there. Of the 20 students, 18 students are in Bobby's class including two from the self-contained / special education class. Some of the students smiled at me as they entered, others just found their seats. I was glad they didn’t give me away. Having any of them say “Hi” to me or acknowledge my presence could have easily distracted Bobby causing him to act differently then he would have normally.

I was seated at an unoccupied desk/workspace in the back, right, corner of the room. No one would be seated at the few desks in front of or next to me. My initial thought was to be far away from his workspace, aware that Bobby cannot see far distances.

I watched as Bobby found his way to his workspace and Joan followed. Bobby’s desk is front and center. He appeared to not have any difficulty getting to his seat. He did not bump into anything or anyone and his aide did not assist him. Unlike the other students, his desk surface is tilted upward at about a 45-degree angle to be more easel-
like. Due to his optic disability, he can view objects more efficiently if they are magnified or at a close proximity.

Joan sits on a stool to his right. She has her own paper to demonstrate Jon’s examples since Bobby cannot view the board from his seat. When Jon does give directions in the front of the classroom, he is only about four feet in front of him.

Any supplies the students needed were already at their workspace. There was a piece of black, velour paper and a box of oil pastels. The black velour paper intensifies the color of the oil pastels. They have a tendency to be slightly messy and are wrapped in paper similar to regular crayons. Since this project was continued from the previous week, a portion of the paper has already been worked on. Therefore, the class was continuing to work on pansies for spring (Figure 2).

I remained far away from Bobby and Joan so he was not aware I was watching. As they begin to talk, I was too far away to hear specifics of their conversations so I relocated to the front, right corner of the room. This way I had a clear view of the featured project, directions, conversations, and body language. I was now about ten feet from them next to the art supply closet.

As I watched and class began, Bobby appeared “squirmier” than last time I observed him. The last time there was a substitute aide. This time he continuously readjusted himself on his stool, was rocking, and being chatty with Joan. She redirected him when this happened. They began working with the oil pastels. Jon explained that they would need light green and dark green from their pastel box. He explained that today they would be finishing stems and adding leaves to their flowers. I watched as Joan reached into the pastel box and put both colors in front of him, possibly to save time or
out of habit. I recalled the substitute aide from the previous week did the same thing. Joan then demonstrated on his paper how to make the stems after Jon has shown the class. I observed Bobby closely inspect Joan’s example drawings. He leaned over and had his face about an inch and a half to two inches from her paper.

As Bobby added to his work, I noticed he works with his right hand and his left is in the middle of the paper as a guide. Joan softly described what she was doing on her own paper as she worked. When she speaks, she is sure not to distract the rest of the class. His face was centimeters away from her drawing as she worked. Bobby then “practiced” on her paper to learn the skills she was interpreting for him. I watched him feel the back of the velour paper to discover the different textures on his own. At this time, Joan cautioned him that his work could smear. He constantly examines his work. He appeared to be completely focused on what he was doing despite the fact that it is a busy room, very noisy, and he was moving a lot. Students were raising their hands to flag Jon over to their workspace, and the heater was very loud.

He puts his head on his right hand as he works. I noticed he does this a lot. I wonder if it helps him to be closer to his work or if his head gets tired from having to keep it so close to what he is doing.

The student who sits to his left (table partner) looks a lot like Bobby. He is about the same height and build. He also wears glasses. He checked out Bobby’s work, briefly just to see what he is doing. There was not any actual interaction. Wondering if he remained unaware of my presence, I mouthed to Joan if he knew I was there and she responded by shaking her head and mouthing back, “No.”
Bobby tested colors on Joan’s paper. Once he appeared satisfied, he went back to his own paper. As he worked, he seemingly disregarded Jon’s directions and waited for Joan’s demonstration. Then, he rested his chin on his desk to check out her example. Bobby ended up with some stray pastel marks on his face. Joan told me this is a regular occurrence. He inspected the work over and over and studied it at a close range. Bobby used his left eye, the one with a small amount of sight, and tilted his head so his left eye is about two inches from the paper. He then he moved his whole head across the page to “see”. Since he is unable to simply move his eye across the paper, he must move his entire head.

Jon met with him to check his progress. He confirms that Bobby was doing a good job with “That’s it, that’s it” comments. Jon then went over where to put the stems for buds and explained that each one gets its own stem and later, leaves. Bobby did not interact with his classmates during this time. Not many of the students talk to their classmates except for brief comments. Once again, Bobby was completely focused on his work and doing a “good job”.

While Bobby worked, the pastels needed to have the paper peeled back for a better tip to work with. Joan saw him trying to do it and took over for him. Bobby and Joan communicate primarily about the task at hand. When Bobby talked while Jon was giving directions, she “shushed” him and redirected him to listen although she would recap in a bit.

As they worked, she moved her example work above his for an easier view. Sometimes Jon worked on that paper since Bobby can’t see the board examples clearly.
Toward the end of class, Jon revealed that Bobby would be the “Star Artist” next week. This means that he will sit in the front of the room at a special workspace, wear a starred vest, and receive a certificate. Every student has the opportunity to be “Star Artist”; it was Bobby’s turn in the rotation. Bobby appears to be very excited about this news. He continued to work and had no difficulty reaching for the pastels he needed all by himself. Next week they will be adding veins to the leaves and a butterfly. Then, they will be finished with the project. Jon came over to Bobby’s desk to mark with green pastel dots as to where the leaves should be made next week. Jon selected a helper to collect the papers and the students began to finish the day’s activity. I left the room as they cleaned up and prepared to leave.

Figure 2 Pansy Project: Oil Pastel on Velour Paper
Bobby’s Description of the Art Room

Prior to the start of our second interview that took place in the art room, I asked Bobby to describe the room to me. I gave him my tape recorder and told him to walk around the room and take me on a tour of what he sees. He immediately began with the floor. He described the tiles as turquoise squares on the floor with blue outlines and a peachy-orange. Next he moved onto the desks. He said that the desk was a sort of a brown color. With an effort to get a little more information I asked if they were more like desks or tables. He said they are more like tables having stools instead of chairs. As he moved to the back of the room he came to the back worktables. He described them as having buckets on them with “things; stuff that an art room would have.”

Next we moved to the front of the room toward the chalk and bulletin boards. He said the bulletin board has pictures on it. I was looking for specifics, so I asked him to describe the pictures. He recognized flower and the house we were working on last week. I asked if he remembered doing some of the examples on the board in first grade. He remembered doing some of the projects from first grade as well.

As he began to appear finished with his commentary, I asked him to describe the ceiling. He laughed and simply responded that there is art on the ceiling. He said it was tough for him to see from down where he was standing. After asking him to explain the art on the ceiling, he could only make out that there are some animals and some pictures and possibly some other things but he couldn’t see it. I asked him if it was because they were too far away and he agreed and said it was too hard. He then diverted my attention away from the thing he couldn’t see to something else he noticed in the room. Another bulletin board had tribal art created by a few second graders. He commented that he liked
it and then we discussed some of the elements of the work he like most. As we talked
about the pictures, he did not have any difficulty identifying any shapes and colors we
saw.

Bobby’s description of the art room was very accurate with the exception of the
ceiling. This was assumed since the ceiling is about six feet above his head. He was able
to walk around the room and describe things as he moved or I asked him. This was
insightful as to what he could clearly see. I was surprised at how much he was able to
decipher. He was comfortable with expressing if things weren’t clear of easily seen when
I asked him about the ceiling tiles. Most of his accuracy could be attributed to his
experiences in the room, the amount of times he has been there, or overall familiarity of
the room itself.

After Bobby’s tour of the art room, we met later in the day for our second
interview (Appendix D p. 65).
CHAPTER FOUR
Emergent Themes and Findings

I began the study with distributing the necessary consent forms to Bobby, his parents, teachers, and aide, as well as his classmates. I assured them of confidentiality and any consequences resulting from participating in the study. Next I spoke with his parents to gain a better understanding of his condition and to learn more about his personality. I have prepared a series of questions to collect this data and I spoke with them via telephone to conduct an interview. I have questioned his classroom teacher and one-on-one the aide to distinguish what it done for him in the classroom to modify instruction. They have also been able to provide me with his behavior and personality traits in the classroom. The art teacher and I have reviewed upcoming projects and arranged times for me to observe Bobby in the art room. From these experiences, themes developed.

The research questions mentioned in Chapter One were designed to provide an initial framework for the study and a starting point. As a result of using those questions, four themes emerged. The themes are: (1) Despite his optical disorder, Bobby has an incredibly high self-esteem, (2) Bobby performs authentic modifications of his own, (3) Modifications performed by Bobby’s aide and teachers are not all specific to his 504 or intentional, and (4) The amount of work done for Bobby by his one-on-one aide hinders the production of authentic work and creativity.
Theme One: Self Esteem

The first theme relates directly to Bobby's behavior, personality, and self-esteem. Interestingly enough, despite his disorder, he displayed a positive attitude toward art and view of himself as an artist.

As Bobby worked, he appeared to be completely focused. He is interested in what he is working on and checks to make sure Joan is aware of his progress. When he had completed a flower for his pansy project he said, “Finished that one” (Appendix C p. 55) to make sure his aide was paying attention. He constantly inspects his work by looking over it; feeling it; running it by his aide for approval. He seems to be eager to receive positive comments.

During the first observation on January 30, Jon asked the simple question to check on Bobby's progress, “How is it coming?” Bobby responded loud and clear, “How do you think its coming?” (p. 55) Bobby appeared to be a little “showier” than usual when he was aware of my presence. When I was sitting next to him during instruction, he was much more talkative than when Joan is next to him. He seemed to have a comment for everything. He talked as he worked which was beneficial to the study, however, it bordered on being excessive. He constantly asked if it (his project) looked good. Usually Joan, Jon, or myself gave a positive comment and the occasional criticism that he never seemed to take offense to.

Once he made a mistake on one of the leaves. He replied, “I know how to fix that problem!” He colored over the mistake using his black oil pastel. I asked him where he learned to do that and did he teach himself and he responded with a confident “Yep.”
He is very comfortable with being asked to talk about himself and if the topic of
conversation is not interesting to him, he switches the conversation and asks “How’s that
leaf?” as if to bring our focus back to his work aware that it is the point of the study.

When I asked Bobby to describe the other things he does in his spare time. He
went on to share that he is also a “pianist” and he goes to piano lessons on Tuesdays. At
this point, he went on to further explain his accomplishments:

“Another talent of mine? Straight “A” student, I also like m-a-t-h (spells it out as the
Braille symbol as if to show off- I joked and thanked him that I do know how to spell the
word...) I got a lot of talent in me and you can tell that this is one, right?” (p. 57)

His high level of self-esteem is evident. He is comfortable with expressing the
things he is good at and expressing himself in general. He also views himself as a
talented artist despite his optical disorder. He does not display any sense of frustration or
dissatisfaction with his work. Even when there might be a mistake, he doesn’t get
frustrated he stays positive. When I specifically asked him if he is ever frustrated in art he
responded, “Never in art. Art’s always happy” (p. 57)

During an observation when I was sitting with him, in a “show off” kind of
manner he said, “This is how you draw buds. If you want to know, pay attention.” Later
he shared, “Did you know that if the rub the dirt off of a crayon it shines? Bet you didn’t
know that one did ya!”(p. 57) He spoke to me as though he had a thing or two to teach
me. Despite his occasional display of over confidence, Bobby is just searching for
positive reassurance with comments such as-“How does this look?” “How am I doing?”
etc.
I am discovering that although Bobby seemed to be so independent and displayed tendencies of a “know-it-all”, he is okay with being provided with a lot of assistance. I have not seen him refuse any help or insist on doing something by himself. He appears willing to ask for assistance and demonstrates a “you work for me, so prepare to be impressed” quality. He shows off a lot when I am sitting next to him in class. His aide, Joan, does not acknowledge it, she just moves along not feeding into his comments.

When I asked him how he feels about art he shared that, “I think art’s great. It’s a good thing.” He said he is good at it, he has talent in it, and he knows “how to do certain things properly”. I asked him what his parents say when he brings his artwork home. He shared that, “They think I’m really good in art and I am really good in art” (Appendix D p. 67) With Bobby’s view of himself as an artist being positive, it is important to know how he is able to achieve what is being asked of him. How does he adapt and demonstrate what art skills have been taught to him?

Theme Two: Self-Modifications

The second theme is Bobby performs specific self-modifications. He has unique ways of adapting to the task at hand on his own despite any assistance he receives from those around him. Bobby does not have difficulty identifying colors because he holds the oil pastels a quarter of an inch from his face and examines them carefully. For reassurance, he checks with Jon to make sure he knows the colors to use. During and observation, Jon instructed the class to find black in their oil pastel box. Bobby chose brown first then said, “No, that’s brown”, and selected black.

Bobby also moves his whole head rather than just his eyes to examine colors and the paper he is working on. He relies on the bottom, left, quadrant of his left eye as his
primary source of vision. When observing him in the hallway his head is always slightly tilted as he walks. He uses his limited vision to establish his bearings and find his way as he moves. Although he relies heavily on his sight, Bobby also utilizes his other senses to take in information. He constantly feels the materials he is working with. During the pansy project, I observed him feeling the velour paper to almost remind himself of what he did the previous week. The same with the pencil sketches. He also smelled the oil pastels and crayons. On one occasion he even had his aide smell the pastels.

Bobby is right-handed. As he works, his left hand holds the paper in place and his head rests on the back of his right hand. This allows him to have that closer look at his work he needs and relieves him when he gets tired from leaning over. If he is not resting his head, he tilts his head so his left eye is closer to his work. When he uses scissors to cut paper, he cuts close to his face too. He uses his fingers as a guide to cut along. When I was observing him he asked if I could spin the paper as he cut out the heart shapes Jon pre-traced for him. Bobby has adapted using his hands as tools to measure, guide, and create as he works in the art room.

Bobby is very thoughtful when it comes to his work. He works carefully and is able to stay on his paper. He constantly inspects his progress and continually looks over his work during instruction with his face being about two inches away from his paper. He tests colors on his aide’s practice paper first and if he makes a mistake he works to fix it so it blends into the picture and can go unnoticed.

Since light is an issue for him, his 504 states that he must sit with his back to the windows to cut down on glare. However, during one observation when Bobby was “Star Artist” and sat at the “special desk” in the front of the room, he did not have enough light
to work. He raised his hand and notified the art teacher, Jon. Jon moved his desk under the lights as his Joan went back to his classroom and got his desk light. That made a big difference and then he was able to get back to work. At recess, his classroom teacher explained that on a sunny day Bobby has difficulty with spatial awareness; the sunlight can throw him off. But she said he knows his limitations. He doesn’t go too far away from where she is or run too fast. She said he stays in the middle of the soccer field. When recess is over, he comes in to line up with his class at the sound of the whistle or his classmates let him know time is up. Bobby has good survival skills. He is aware of how to adapt in certain situations. He knows what he can do on his own and what he may need assistance with.

Theme Three: Outside Modifications

The third theme is that the modifications performed by Bobby’s aide, art and classroom teachers and that they are not all intentional or specified in his 504. When in the classroom during reading, writing, or math instruction, he uses a close-circuit TV. The machine he uses is used to enlarge pictures and print is a black/white close circuit TV. It can show black print on a white background or vice versa. It is easier for him to see white print on a black background. He also writes in marker or darker lead pencils such as a 6B. The markers are usually a paper mate flare. However, he also uses wet erase markers because they wash off and he usually gets marker all over himself. Joan occasionally writes stories as Bobby dictates to her. When he types stories in Braille she writes in pencil above his words/symbols.

In art, since Bobby is unable to see the board examples from his seat despite being in the first row, he is encouraged to go up to the front of the room to get a closer
look. While at his seat, Bobby works with Joan sitting closely to his right. She has a separate sheet of paper for extra direction. She interprets the board examples for Bobby so he has his own example to view at a closer proximity. Jon occasionally does a demonstration on the example paper if he thinks Bobby might have difficulty. Since Joan is with him, Jon can briefly check on Bobby to record his progress, offer any criticism, and then continue his lesson or checking on the other students.

When Jon does demonstrations, he used black marker so it is easier to see. When he is working one-on-one with Bobby, Jon creates "landmarks" as to where certain aspects should be. For example, when Bobby was working on his pansy project, Jon mapped out where some of the leaves should go since Bobby has difficulty seeing the picture as a whole. Joan has also showed him how to use his pencil to judge distance in his work. Once a class, Jon checks on Bobby to discuss his plan for his artwork. He also will take Bobby up to the board, and so will Joan, if they are attempting to capture a certain aspect of the example.

Jon says that he doesn’t have to do as much to accommodate Bobby since Joan is already aware of how to adjust and modify. He said that he treats Bobby the same as any other student in the class. Bobby hands out papers and other supplies and gets to be “Star Artist”. Jon said that he modifies if he sees Bobby not getting something or if the Joan can’t interpret the skill being taught. His main modification is having Bobby up front and with his back to the windows.

Most of the assistance that is provided for Bobby is unintentional. Jon himself said that it could be primarily “human nature” to want to help someone in need. It’s instinctive to have the desire to make life a little easier for someone who might be
struggling. The question is, how much assistance does Bobby need in art, and how does it affect his artwork?

Theme Four: Degree of Assistance

The forth theme that became evident is that the amount of work done for Bobby does not allow him to produce authentic works of art possibly hindering creativity. The relationship between him and his aide was examined. Bobby and Joan sit closely during regular and art class instruction. During instruction Joan is at a close range and is very hands-on when assisting him. However, while the students are lined up and in transition to lunch or specials, Joan does not walk next to Bobby, but follows behind the group. Bobby is able to navigate the halls on his own.

On January 18, I stopped by Bobby’s classroom to say “hi” to Bobby and to see Joan. When I said hi to him, he immediately turned to Joan to have her identify my voice. She also reminded him of my study. I could tell that although he appears so independent, he still looks to her for reassurance whether it’s necessary or not.

During an observation of the pansy lesson, Jon told the students to find peach and brown in their oil pastel box. Joan selected the colors for Bobby and put them in front of him. This happened several other times throughout the course of the lesson. He seems to have no problems identifying the various colors on his own. He can select the colors with accuracy. Occasionally when he picks a pastel from the box he has to hold it up to his left eye to make sure it is the correct one. And when the paper around the oil pastel needed to be peeled back, Joan took over there too. Assistance in these areas isn’t necessary.

Joan will also draw for him on his paper or he tells her what to draw. Then, he colors it in. When he is merely coloring, the work is not an example of his creativity.
Bobby is telling Joan where to put things and what to draw but a sighted person does it. She also draws dots on Bobby’s paper for him to connect. This way she is providing the guidelines and he is doing the actual drawing. Joan then describes the type of line he needs to make to connect the dots. This process simply helps with mapping out his work. His thoughts on this are,

It helps me to where I can like go from one dot to the next so I don’t make a mistake. And why it’s a little confusing is; it can also get me confused by the line, it may get squiggly, cause I’m drawing crooked lines.

(It’s difficult for you to draw straight lines?)

Yeah, like if I’m drawing a line all the way across the page. It probably ain’t going to be straight you know? (Appendix D p. 67)

At the end of class periods students are told to write their names at the bottom of their paper. After Bobby does this, Joan traces over his name to make it darker.

During one observation, Joan sat in the back of the room and I sat next to Bobby. I was curious to see if he would expect me to help the way Joan does. On his way up to the front of the room to check out the board, he seemed distracted and a little disoriented. He fell on the floor twice; once getting up from his stool and another when sitting back down he missed it completely. He was rushing, confused, and disoriented by my chair and me in the way. However, he eventually calmed down and felt at ease with asking me to do things as well. From his work I have observed and photographed, he is capable of drawing on his own. Consequently, he has become accustomed to having someone there so he can delegate. When he wanted to make additions to his project he drew a little and asked me to fill in the rest.
I asked him the type of things that Joan does for him. He explained that, “She helps me see things if I can’t see them.” He went on to say that she helps him know where things are. I brought up the paper Joan has to show him examples/demos of the skill. This led to questioning his independence. I wanted to know how much of help she is to him. “She is especially helpful in art” (p. 67) He mentioned that he can do some subjects on his own. He explained that he is able to check out the board on his own in his regular classroom as well. He said that when he enters his classroom in the morning, he goes to the front of the room to see what his job is or what work he needs to be doing. He then described his normal morning routine.

Bobby reviewed that Joan supplies him with a darker lead pencil and he uses a regular pencil for certain things. He said the darker pencil is easier for him to see. During the observation on February 20, the students were doing pencil sketches (Figure 3). This was very challenging for Bobby. Although pencil is difficult for him to see and the sketches had to be light, Joan gave him a 6B, darker lead pencil to use for the lesson. Since this was a challenging lesson, this is where Joan used the connect-the-dot technique with him. For this lesson especially, it was evident Bobby received assistance. When Jon was asked how Bobby did with the pencil sketch he commented that he did “kinda” well, but it was apparent he has an aide (p. 70). Jon agrees that Bobby can do more than he is allowed. He appreciates how Joan modifies the work for Bobby and knows his areas that require attention better than anyone, but the level of assistance is what needs to be modified.

The result of having excessive assistance is affecting Bobby’s ability to produce authentic artwork. There should be a minimal level of support to assist him while being
cautious not to hinder creativity. Bobby is capable of doing a lot of the work on his own. However, he is very seldom given the opportunity.

Figure 3 House Pencil Sketch on Gray Paper

When comparing his work to that of his sighted classmates, there is not much of a difference. Other than some of his lines being slightly crooked, his work does not stand out or is identifiable. However, much of his work has been drawn for him. Therefore, it is not an authentic representation of either his creativity or ability as a young artist. By speaking with his classroom and art teachers, and mother, as well as through my own observations, it is evident that Bobby is a creative individual and is very capable of demonstrating this creativity. Just by speaking with and observing him he demonstrates a unique way of thinking and adapting to his situation. It was shared by his teachers that if people hang back a little, he would be able to show us what he can do on his own. Those who work with Bobby need to be patient and let him figure things out for himself. He is able to identify colors and describe shapes and contours just not as quickly as some of his sighted classmates. Figure 4 is an example of his work where he received a lot of assistance.
When I was talking to Bobby's mother Sharon, I asked if she feels he needs an aide. I did not share my thoughts on the topic; I just wanted to hear what she had to say. She began by describing that she was mainstreamed 36 years ago when aides weren't even an option. She respects the fact that legally he is required to have an aide despite his capability. She shared that Joan takes the pressure off of Bobby's teachers by adapting the materials since that can be a job in itself. She said that other than for those reasons; no. Bobby is doing a great job in school and so far he has earned straight A's. His successes were not attributed to the levels of assistance he receives. She commended her son's achievements as well as intelligence. Sharon felt that Bobby is doing very well in second grade and school in general. She appreciates his independence and knows it is an important trait to have since there is not always going to be an aide with him for the rest of his life.
CHAPTER FIVE

Suggestions for the Future

At this point in his schooling, Bobby has demonstrated academic success and a high level of self-esteem. He views himself as being both an exceptional student and artist. He is at ease with discussing his many talents and has not alluded to any frustrations that may inhibit his successes. The fact that he views himself so highly as an artist may change once he has the opportunity to do more work on his own, without so much assistance and ability to delegate some of his work. The future may be a humbling experience.

His teachers are fearful that in a matter of time, possibly even as soon as in the near future, Bobby is setting up for a fall. School isn’t going to always be easy for him and he needs to be aware of that. His classmates might begin to react to his constant display of certainty. As of now, students in the primary grades are very forgiving if not oblivious to their classmate’s “quirks” and differences. Joan has shared that his “blindisms” such as rocking, squirming, and excessive blinking may soon appear as odd behavior to his peers. His attitude and over confidence may begin to interfere socially as well. It had been observed by his classroom teacher and aide that because of his poor vision, Bobby is missing the cues of disapproval from his classmates. When he makes a comment that insists his wrong answers are correct, tries to “wow” someone with his knowledge of art techniques, or gets upset that the children on the bus won’t let him tell the substitute bus driver where to go, these are examples of his behavior. Bobby’s frustrations, although he refuses to believe it, are beginning to surface.
But what does this all mean for teachers? How are these issues directly affecting Bobby’s experiences in art? It is safe to say that over the next few years Bobby will be encountering some changes; especially socially. In the art room, he needs to continue to receive accommodations to allow opportunities for success. However, the level of assistance should be thoughtfully reconsidered. He is able to work on his own; the work just may need to be modified.

Bobby is not helpless. He does not require work to be done for him but with modifications. The role of his aide needs to be redefined. His limited sight does allow for him to view things at a close distance. But, being unable to see the board examples make it necessary for him to have his own example and/or additional explanations. Having an aide or teacher do work directly on his paper is not allowing him to be successful on his own. When this happens, the artwork is no longer solely his, but a shared piece. Thus, it could make grading his work difficult.

When he has the opportunity to do work on his own, he is given the chance to show his creative side. In his regular class he was given an assignment for Earth Day. Students were to create something else from a piece of trash. It could be recycled artwork or something functional. Interestingly enough, Bobby chose to make binoculars (Figure 5). This project was to be completed at home and then was displayed in the hallway. A description was to accompany the creation. In his description, Bobby explained using two toilet paper rolls and two curved plastic bottle pieces to make the lenses. Then he taped them together and wrapped both in aluminum foil. He shared that his mother gave him the rolls and his dad cut the plastic shapes for him. Alongside his binoculars is Braille description he typed and a handwritten interpretation by Joan.
Bobby is able to distinguish color, shape, and pattern with little to no hesitation. Occasionally he requires assistance determining where things should go on his paper and mapping out his work. Jon works with Bobby to figure out a game plan for him to concentrate on. He checks on Bobby to follow up on his progress. Bobby is never behind as far as timing is concerned. There are classmates who are a little faster and more efficient, and there are those who lag behind and whose work isn’t as neatly done as Bobby’s. Despite the way he critiques his own work, Bobby’s work is average. Nothing makes it stand out from the rest. His use of color is what he is directed to use and his subject matter is usually predetermined or mostly created by someone other than himself.

Having the chance to work with a visually impaired student is rare. Bobby is one of the only two cases in the entire district. Therefore, Bobby’s case is an important one. It will allow for other teachers in the district to have the unique opportunity to know more about students with visual impairments and acquire resources for instruction. Through the
use of this study, one-on-one aides may want to have their role more clearly defined. As mentioned before, it is human nature to want to help someone who might be struggling or in need. However, the amount of help given can make all the difference. It is understood that the teachers and aides are all looking out for the best interest of the student. Consequently, they must work together to find a level of assistance that will create a fair playing field but not hinder student creativity and authenticity.

According to Main (2006), most students take the visual approach for granted, using it only to reinforce the audio, or merely duplicate a concept without the benefit of complete understanding. She feels that the visually impaired have no choice but to rely on the audio and hands-on methods. Although Bobby relies on the little vision he has to interpret art, if he was occasionally given the opportunity to experience art in a tactile way he might be able to do more work by himself. Using this tactile approach and spatial approach, art can be taught successfully to the visually impaired. Main states that research shows students learn in unique ways and benefit from instruction on varying degrees of audio, visual, and hands-on methods (2006). While some only rely on one mode, other may require using all three for complete comprehension.

When it comes to Bobby’s demonstration of the skills he has learned, all he had done is draw and color in. Occasionally someone draws for him then he colors it in. The main theme and issue of this study has been that too much is done for him. Between the drawing directly on his paper, and him delegating what he wants done on his paper, very little is primarily his work. When he has been asked if he gets frustrated at all in art he says he doesn’t. This could be since much of his work isn’t solely his.
In the classroom Joan and his teacher comment that Bobby's Braille is really coming along. He has made tremendous progress and it is becoming easier for him. His family felt that Braille was important to learn in the first place since it is possible that one day he could completely lose the little vision he has. With this in mind, according to Main, students can learn specific techniques of feeling art with their hands and gliding across the artwork as if reading Braille (2006). Making art class for Bobby as rich as an experience as possible, will make a difference in his artwork and real accomplishments as a young artist. Although this will require more prep work and more time to meet these objectives, his aide can be utilized for that purpose along with the art teacher.

I am excited that I will have the opportunity to try this approach with Bobby next year when he is in third grade. I will be the building art teacher beginning in the 2007-2008 school year. I also feel it will be advantageous to have the other students in the class try to experience art this way. Having them realize how difficult the project might be will help them appreciate Bobby's work a little more, as well as their own.
REFERENCES


APPENDIX A

Consent Forms and Permission slips
November 17, 2006

Principal
School
11 Drive
NJ

Dear [Name],

I am requesting permission to conduct a case study at School for my Seminar and Investigation graduate course and my master’s thesis at Rowan University. My study will investigate the experiences of a visually impaired student in a visual arts curriculum. Data will be collected through observations and interviews.

Since the desired subject is a minor, I will be distributing a consent form to his parents pending your approval. In the final report, the school and name would be changed to assure confidentiality. The study will begin the fall 2006 semester and conclude in spring 2007.

Please let me know, in writing, if I have your permission to conduct the study. Thank you very much for your time and attention.

Sincerely,

Kristina Benton
Dear,

As you may know, I am a second grade teacher at School. I am also going back to college so one day I can be an art teacher.

I have to do a project this year before I finish my program. I have decided to study what visually impaired/blind students experience during art class.

I was wondering if you would like to help me with this project. I would be interviewing you and watching you during your art classes. This will help me to get the information I need.

If I have your permission to interview and observe you, please sign your name and today’s date on the lines below.

Thanks.

Miss Benton

Name  Date
Dear Mr. and Mrs.

As part of my graduate studies, I am conducting a research project for my master's thesis at Rowan University. This study will examine the experiences of a visually impaired student in a visual arts program at-------.

I am requesting permission to interview and observe as the subject for my case study. I feel that will provide major insight as to what visually impaired students encounter during art class. I would be observing the interpretation of skills, style, and use of color. I would also be noting the feelings and views of art itself. One-on-one interviews will also be a means of collecting data. The study will coincide with instructional time and I would be working with the classroom and art teachers.

I am also requesting permission to interview you both to collect information about and his experiences. In the final report, any names mentioned will be changed to assure confidentiality.

If you chose to allow , and yourselves, to participate in the study, please complete and return this form by xxxxxxx

I appreciate your time, and look forward to having the opportunity to work with all of you.

Sincerely,

Kristina Benton
Second Grade Teacher

To: Kristina Benton

We, the parents of , give our consent for our son to participate in this case study exploring the experiences of a visually impaired student in a visual arts program at School. We also give permission to be interviewed as per contribution to the study.

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November 17, 2006

Dear Parents and Guardians,

As part of my graduate studies, I am conducting a research project for my master’s thesis at Rowan University. This study will examine the experiences of a visually impaired student in a visual arts program at-----.

I am interviewing and observing one of your child’s classmates -----as the subject for my case study. ----- will provide major insight as to what visually impaired students encounter during art class. I would be observing the interpretation of skills, style, and use of color. I will also be observing your child and their interaction with ----- . Any names will be changed to protect confidentiality.

If you chose to allow your child to participate in the study, please complete and return this form by xxxxxxx

I appreciate your time and consideration.
Sincerely,

Kristina Benton
Second Grade Teacher

To: Kristina Benton

We, the parents of , give our consent for our child to participate in this case study exploring the experiences of a visually impaired student in a visual arts program at School.

Printed name ___________________________ Signature ___________________________ Date

Printed name ___________________________ Signature ___________________________ Date
November 13, 2006

Dear Mr. and Mrs.-------,

My name is Kristina Benton and I am a second grade teacher at School. I am currently attending Rowan University and will receive my master’s in Art Education. For my thesis I have decided to examine the experiences of a visually impaired student during art instructional time.

I will be interviewing and observing a second grade, visually impaired student, at ---- School. The subject will be the focus of my case study.

To better familiarize myself with the interview process, I am required to conduct a practice interview. I will be asking questions directly related to his feelings and attitude toward art class.

I am requesting permission to use your son as my practice subject. If I have your permission, please sign the bottom portion and return it to your child’s classroom teacher by XXX.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Kristina Benton

We, the parents of , give permission for Kristina Benton to conduct a practice interview, as per requirement in the preparation of her master’s thesis.

Signature __________________________ Date  
Signature __________________________ Date
Dear __________________, (classroom teacher)

I am currently in the final stages of my graduate studies. In May, I will receive my master’s in Art Education from Rowan University. As part of my program I am required to write a thesis. I have decided to explore the experiences of a visually impaired student in a visual arts program at the elementary level.

I have selected --- as my subject for my case study. I will be observing the student during art instructional time and will be conducting interviews.

I am requesting permission to observe you and your interactions with ---. In addition, I would need to interview you as a source of supplemental information.

Please sign the portion below if I have your permission to be a part of the study.
Thank you for your time and consideration.

Your colleague,

Kristina Benton
2nd Grade Teacher

I, ________________________________, allow for Kristina Benton to observe and interview me as necessary for the study titled: Being Visually Impaired in a Visual Arts Curriculum: A Case Study.

_______________________________  ______________________________
Signature  Date
November 13, 2006

Dear ________________, (art teacher)

I am currently in the final stages of my graduate studies. In May, I will receive my master’s in Art Education from Rowan University. As part of my program I am required to write a thesis. I have decided to explore the experiences of a visually impaired student in a visual arts program at the elementary level.

I have selected _____ as my subject for my case study. I will be observing the student during art instructional time and will be conducting interviews.

I am requesting permission to observe you and your interactions with _____. In addition, I would need to interview you as a source of supplemental information.

Please sign the portion below if I have your permission to be a part of the study.
Thank you for your time and consideration.

Your colleague,

Kristina Benton
2nd Grade Teacher

__________________________________________________________

I, ________________________________, allow for Kristina Benton to observe and interview me as necessary for the study titled: Being Visually Impaired in a Visual Arts Curriculum: A Case Study.

Signature ____________________________ Date ____________________________
Dear ____________, (aide)

I am currently in the final stages of my graduate studies. In May, I will receive my master’s in Art Education from Rowan University. As part of my program I am required to write a thesis. I have decided to explore the experiences of a visually impaired student in a visual arts program at the elementary level.

I have selected _____ as my subject for my case study. I will be observing the student during art instructional time and will be conducting interviews.

I am requesting permission to observe you and your interactions with-----. In addition, I would need to interview you as a source of supplemental information.

Please sign the portion below if I have your permission to be a part of the study. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Your colleague,

Kristina Benton
2nd Grade Teacher

______________________________
I, ____________________________, allow for Kristina Benton to observe and interview me as necessary for the study titled: *Being Visually Impaired in a Visual Arts Curriculum: A Case Study.*

Signature ____________________________ Date ____________________________
APPENDIX B

Background Information
At this point I have selected the title, “Being Visually Impaired in a Visual Arts Curriculum”. I have received the “ok” from my building principal, Dennis Burd, and Bryan’s classroom teacher, Lynn Peligrini on (9/27/06).

I called Bryan’s mom, Suzanne, to ask for permission to conduct the case study on her son. I explained the purpose and process of the study. I gave her my cell phone number if there were ever any concerns throughout the course of the semester. She shared some basic background info: his sight is 20/800; I didn’t get a chance to record the name of the specific condition (next conversation). She described him as having poor sight but being ok mobility-wise. She is visually impaired as well and did not realize that it was a genetic condition. Bryan has a 50% chance of passing it to his children. Her other child, younger daughter, does not have the disability.

10/12/06

I have lunch with Jane Sear Bryan’s 1x1 aides. During this time we discussed:
* How he uses a close-circuit TV, marker or dark lead pencils, when reading, writing, or doing math.
* I asked if things are translated into brail for Bryan’s mom. Jane commented that dad is sighted (which I already knew) and grandmom is around a lot too, so it isn’t necessary.
* Jane also will sometimes write stories as Bryan dictates to her. When he types stories in brail, she will write in pencil above his words/symbols.

1/18/07

By this day it had been awhile since I approached any of the participants of the study. Although Bryan had filled out the consent form, I had not formally introduced myself. Today I swung in his classroom to say “hi” to Bryan and to see Jane. When I said hi to him, he immediately turned to Jane to have her identify my voice. She also reminded him of my study.

1/19/07

During my lunch meeting with Jane (aide) she shared:
-he is totally blind in his right eye
-as he reads and follows words in a sentence, needs a few seconds to readjust (refocus).
-the machine he uses to enlarge pictures and print is a black/white close circuit TV. It can show black print on a white background or vice versa. It is easier for him to see white print on a black background.
-1/4 of his left pupil is used, lower left
-light is a major issue (recess)
-runs around at recess, doesn’t trip or fall, is difficult to find his bearings outside
-has a portable florescent light (OTT) for desk
-acording to his IEP, his back is to be to the window to cut down on glare
Continued…
-art is on Tuesdays @ 9:45 for a 40 minute period
-Bryan does get help or he’d fall behind
-can’t always complete projects at home b/c mom is blind as well
-Jane has separate paper for extra direction
-she uses marker for examples so he can see it easier, she buys him 6B pencils to use
(soft lead, dark lines, erasable)
-in the classroom he is starting to write really small (experimentation?) using CCTV, paper mate flare, he also uses wet erase markers b/c they wash off and he usually gets marker all over himself
-they sit close not to disrupt class
-he loves colors, prefers ones with exotic names: scarlet to red; sky blue to blue…he tries to avoid primary colors if he can
1/30/07

1st observation, 1st day of pansy art project

*he does not know I am observing him

*sub classroom teacher and 1x1 aide

-Bryan comes right in and checks what is on the board (pansies on black velour paper), print examples and teacher examples – oil pastels

-Bryan sits in the front row

-Jeff explains that he will do the examples in front of him (Bryan)

-his work table is on an angle so his work can be closer to face, his aide sits to his right (today it was a sub)

-the art teacher described the velour art paper and how it feels

-Bryan goes up to the board to get another/closer look at the examples

-he holds the oil pastels ¼” from his face to “see”

-he fidgets a lot and lowers his head to be more discrete when speaking to his aide being careful not to disturb the rest of the class when they talk

-Bryan asks about the colors that they are allowed to use for the project, Jeff told him that they will talk about that shortly

-so Bryan goes back to examining the colors again

-Bryan then sits “ready” (hands folded and facing front) for instruction

-the heater in the art room is very loud, this could be a major distraction but it doesn’t appear to be, I guess the students have adjusted to the noise by now

-Jeff tells Bryan to find the colors peach and brown in their oil pastel box, his aide helps select the pastels form the box (does it for him)

-Bryan moves his whole head rather than just his eyes to examine the colors

-he checks with Jeff to make sure he knows the colors to use

-Bryan constantly feels the paper and pastels

-his head is 2” from the paper as he works and draws 2 circles as the beginning of the heart shape, to make the pansy shape for the flowers

-his aide demos as he observes

-Bryan is right handed and as he works with his head resting on his hand as he draws

-he pulls down as he draws, as if he is painting with the pastels

-his left hand holds the paper as he works

-as his aide draws on his paper, he tells her how many he wants her to make, then he colors them in

-there is a fellow classmate who sits directly to his left, Bryan appears to lean over to “check out” his work, however, he may just be adjusting himself on the stool

-he smells the pastel, and holds up for his aide to smell too

-he tells her that he wants 1 flower in each corner of his paper

-he doesn’t stop working to look up front

-he doesn’t socialize the way other students are with their partners (desks in 2’s)

-the aide hands him the colors from the pastel box instead of having him find it himself

-I’m assuming that she was doing that since she is a sub and isn’t sure what she should be doing,

-Jeff occasionally comes over to work on the example paper on Bryan’s desk

-Bryan is able to stay on the paper as he works
he goes up a few more times to check out the examples taped up on the board to see if there is a blue or purple pansy
-he holds the colors close to his face to check before he uses it
-he constantly inspects, smells pastels
-he appears anxious to get started
-continually looks over his work during instruction, paper 2” away from his face (eyes)
-Jeff shows his example paper to Bryan: Bryan explains to Jeff; “She does that, I tell her that, I color it in.” he gestures to the portion of the work he is talking about as he speaks
-his aide reminds him to press lightly
-he attempts to peel the paper away from the pastel to make a better tip, the aide takes over, he then inspects it to see if the paper was the problem in the first place
-he puts his head on the back of his right hand as he colors in the pansies
-Jeff and the aide both explain how to go over it again to make it darker
-Jeff reviews how to hold it like a pencil
-Bryan appears to be completely focused on his work
-when he is done a flower he says, “Finished that one.” As is to make sure his aide is paying attention to his progress
-although the art teacher may speak, he never raises his eyes to be directed toward the front of the room
-as he works, I notice he tilts his head so his left eye, sighted eye, is closer to his work
-he constantly inspects his work by “looking” over it; feeling it; running it by his aide for approval
-this sub aide does a lot of the work for him
-I wonder if his regular aide does as well?
*Ask Jeff if this is common with Jane and does HE mind? Is it necessary to do many things for him in art when he appears to be pretty self-sufficient?

Jeff: “How is it coming?”
Bryan: “How do you think its coming?” He comments loud and clear
-at the end of the class, students are told to write their name in the bottom, right, corner of their paper, his aide goes over it for him a little darker
-he inspects his work again with his nose to his paper

(My kids are with my classroom aide and a teacher across the hall is checking in)

1 Week later 2/6/07
2nd Observation – Day 2 of project
Regular classroom teacher and 1x1 aide
(Is not aware of my presence)

-he finds his way to his desk
-I remain far away from Bryan and his aide Jane so he is not aware I am watching
-however, I am too far away to hear specifics of their conversations
-he appears “squirmier” than last time, Jane redirects his
-Bryan closely inspects Jane’s example drawings
-***she hands him the colors he needs (like sub aide)
-he works with his right hand
-left hand is in the middle of the paper
-Jane softly describes what she is doing as she works
-his face is centimeters away from her drawing as she works
-Bryan then “practices” on her paper
-he feels the back of the velour paper to discover the different textures on his own
-Jane cautions his that his work could smear
-he examines his work
-It is a busy room; noisy
-18 students are in his class and 2 from the self-contained class
-*Jeff explains that they will need light green and dark green form their pastel box
-***Jane puts both colors in front of him (to save time? habit?)
-she demos on his paper
-he puts his head on his right hand as he works
-the student who sits to his left (table partner) looks a lot like Bryan, wears glasses also, checks out Bryan’s work, briefly
-I mouth out to Jane if he knows I’m here and she responds by shaking her head and mouthing back, “No.”
-He tests the colors on practice paper
-he seemingly disregards Jeff’s instructions and waits for Jane’s demo
-he rests his chin on the desk to check out the example
--he has some pastel marks on his face
-inspects work over and over
-Jeff asks how he is doing to check on progress, “That’s it, that’s it…) he goes over where to put the stems for buds, explains each one gets its own stem (leaves)
-Jane peels paper from pastel
-does not interact during art class with classmates
-Jane “shushes” him to listen to Jeff
-she puts her example above his for an easier view
-he is “Star Artist” next week
-he continues working and reaches for colors by himself
-Jane retraces his name at the end of class
-next week they will be adding veins to the leaves and a butterfly then they will be done the project
-Jeff marks with a green dot where the leaves should be made

3rd Observation/ 1st Interaction with Bryan
2/13/07 last day of pansy project on velour paper

It is Bryan’s turn in the art room to be “Star Artist”. Every student has the opportunity to sit in the front of the room at a special table and wear the star apron. They also receive a certificate...

This time I am sitting next to him and his aide is in the back of the room assisting the art teacher with prep work. When he sat down, I reintroduced myself so he would get use to my voice. (Earlier that morning I checked with his teacher and aide and they filled him in that I would be doing this)
-he began by reading the “Star Artist” certificate with his name on it
-he was feeling the velour paper for the pansy project as if to remind himself
-he found the dark green pastel right away
-Jeff began to draw dots for where to put the leaves on the paper
  Bryan: “Ok, so they’re landmarks for leaves?”
  Jeff: “Yep, you’re one smart cookie.”
-he (Bryan) appears to be a little “showier” than usual
-Bryan commented a few minutes into the class “It’s not bright enough over here…”
-I asked him “What do you do?”
-he raised his hand and told Jeff
-he dragged his desk to be directly under one of the ceiling lights (where he usually sits, but since he is “Star Artist”…) Jane went to the classroom and brought back his desk light- “That’s great Mrs. Sear!”
-back to work
-made various size leaves
-Jeff instructed the class to find black in their box, he chose brown first then said, “No, that’s brown.” And selected black next
-they were to make black dots on the white petals
-Bryan asked if it looked good
-he thought that the black showing through the white were black dots he already did-
-minor difficulty
-he appears to be okay identifying colors-hold them up to his eye
-he made a mistake on one of the leaves; he replied “I know how to fix that problem!”
-he colored over the mistake using his black oil pastel
-I asked him where he learned to do that and did he teach himself and he responded with a confident “Yep.”
* I used this opportunity as he worked to discover more about Bryan
Q-What’s your favorite color?
A-Light blue/dark blue...colors
*he went on to share about his favorite video game at home and how he just figured out how to customize cars. “Wish I could be playing it right now.”
-he appears to be very comfortable with me, he switches the conversation and asks “How’s that leaf?” as if to bring our focus back to HIS work
-he went on to share that he is also a pianist and he goes to piano lessons today, that he started a year ago today, so it is an anniversary with his teacher (1year)
-“Another talent of mine? Straight “A” student, I also like m-a-t-h (spells it out as the Brail symbol as if to show off- I joked that I do know how to spell the word…) I got a lot of talent in me and you can tell that this is one, right?”

-he got up again to check out the examples on the board
-pointed and described them to him
-he seemed distracted and a little disoriented and fell on the floor 2x’s, once getting up from his stool and another sitting back down/ missed it completely
  * I think he was rushing, confused, disoriented by my chair and me in the way.
-he wanted to make the additions to his project upside down, he drew and asked me to fill in (he knew where to stop when overlapping some of the flowers)
"In a "show off" kind of manner he said, "This is how you draw buds. If you want to know, pay attention." Cockily he worked as if he is in charge and as if I am "just his aide" working for him.

-Jeff came over and made the comment of him working so hard, "I see smoke coming out of your ears."
-Bryan’s response was "Are you kidding?" didn’t get it, Jeff explained
-Jeff discussed Bryan’s plan for his project 1x1
-the project has been completed, now Bryan moves onto the Valentine’s Day animals made from heart cut outs, he finds a pair of scissors in the drawer and comments "Oh, they’re blue, well, turquoise, my favorite color!
-when he cuts, he cuts close to his face too
-he uses his fingers as a guide to cut along
-he asks if I could spin the paper for his as he cuts out the heart shapes Jeff pre-traced for him since class is almost over and it takes him a while to cut
-he appears to have no problem asking for help
-he began to plan his heart creature
-Jeff shows him examples on the board and asks Bryan what he thinks they are

4th Observation
2/20/07- New Project-Edward Hopper Lesson
I sat to his left, his aide, Jane to his right

-Jeff warned that this might/will be difficult for Bryan since they will be doing pencil sketches and shading
-He uses a darker drawing pencil→6B
-Bryan began our time together with telling me he was sick all weekend (delirious) but used a kid-mixed up form of the word
-Jane took him up to the board to check out the artist print the class would attempt to reproduce
-they are doing a pencil drawing on gray paper
-the directions were to use pencils lightly (it is difficult for Bryan to see lightly drawn lines
-Jane follows Jeff’s directions and demos ON Bryan’s paper
-she draws dots for Bryan to connect, this was she is providing the guideline and he is doing the actual drawing
-we briefly discussed his sister/siblings (Jane and I) she is 5 years-old and not visually impaired
-Jane describes the type of line he needs to make to connect the dots
-he apologizes for bumping me which I wasn’t sure if he would considering he didn’t the last time we met. I wonder how conscious he is of accidental contact.
-he worked with his chin on his paper
-Jane demos a diagonal on her paper and describes what she is doing
-he tries and responds; "That ain’t good." Jane shows him how to fix it and pencil stripe in
Bryan searches for constant reassurance that his work is “good”-(I feel he does this to keep the positive comments coming...)
“How does this look?” “How am I doing?” etc.
there are a few stray marks on his paper, but this is expected since he usually has marker all over his hands when I see him
as he draws, he follows the movement of his hand and the line with his whole head
Jane says, “How about we try that one again?”
her soft, nurturing voice, explains in further detail why and how to make it “easier”
“Watch this Bryan...”
he rubbed the picture
Bryan turns to me and tries to “Wow” me with some of his knowledge:
“Did you know that if you rub the dirt off of a crayon it shines? Bet you didn’t know that one did ya?!”
he comments on what he has done so far, “You see how it (the door) goes slightly down? Isn’t that good? I think its good, do you?”
(He compliments himself, searches for me to say something positive, and expects it.)
even when there might be a mistake, he doesn’t get frustrated, stays positive
he checks in with Jane to make sure it is “good”, searching for positive reinforcement
usually I assumed that Bryan is not paying attention to Jeff’s lessons and comments that he just waits for Jane to demo, but when Jeff made a joke about how to understand proportion, Bryan laughed.
Jane shows him how to use the length of his pencil to “map out” his drawing
Jeff is teaching the students how to draw the parts of the house as segmented shapes and lines
Bryan asks Jane is she can make the dots for him to connect a little larger
he does not interact with any of his classmates at this time
he works relatively quickly
once again appears to ignore Jeff-but comments on his statements
Jane tells him he is doing great
she shows him how to use HER pencil (#2 Dixon Ticonderoga) for any light shading he might need to do
Jeff uses a black marker for his demo
I don’t know if me being there, I assume so, is affecting Bryan’s comments and Jane’s “holding back” of doing a lot for him
he recognizes a space in his work and goes back to add more lines to the wall of the house
Jane recapped, “Now what was the last direction he gave you?” to bring him back to listening-he put his name on the bottom, right, corner of his paper
At the end of class I asked him if it would be okay to interview (ask questions) during the 1st ½ of his indoor recess (knowing he hates to miss it so I wanted to ask)
I said, “About 10 minutes?” He responded “Maybe less.”
Transcription:

*So far I have observed Bryan over the course of three, forty minute art periods. The first two I sat on a stool, off to the side, and he was not aware of my presence. The third time, Bryan was “Star Artist”. He sat in the front of the room wearing a special vest and received a certificate. He was aware of me being there since I was interacting with him as he worked.

*During each of the observations several reoccurring themes became evident. His aide does a lot for him and I am under the impression that he is very capable. She hands him the necessary colors, draws examples for him, and he also is very comfortable with telling/occasionally asking her to draw/color something. The aid’s role is also an area I’d like to explore.

*Bryan also constantly inspects his work. He examines it closely and like to show (me when I was sitting with him) the art teacher his progress to receive positive comments. “How is this looking?” “What do you think of this so far?”

*He seems to have no problems identifying the various colors. He can select the colors with accuracy. Occasionally when he picks a pastel from the box he has to hold it up to his left eye to make sure it is the correct one.

*Light is an issue. His 504 states that he must have his back to the windows to cut down on glare. In the art room he sits directly under a light. However, when he was “Star Artist” where his desk was, he did not have enough light. His aide got the desk light he uses in the regular classroom. This made it easier for him to work. (He was much happier and felt he would do a better job.)

*Other classroom noises do not appear to distract him. He is very focused on his work. The art teacher comes over to instruct him on a 1x1 level. His aide will do additional demos on paper next to his.

*Bryan has a high self esteem. He views himself as being very talented and having many talents. He feels very comfortable expressing what he excels at. He also is not bashful at demonstrating his skills (drawing leaves for the project).

*Bryan is “squirmy”. He constantly adjusts himself on his chair. He wiggles and squirms on his stool. He seemingly disregards the art teacher’s instructions and waits for his specific directions.
APPENDIX D

Interviews
1st Interview with Bryan
2/20/07
In the afternoon of the 4th observation

I began with a “thank-you” for meeting since I know it is difficult for him to give up some recess time. I told him that I would keep out first meeting/interview short and I will ask him more questions the next time. We were in the conference room in the office with the door open. This was necessary. However, the commotion and background noise surrounding us caused minor distraction. For one question, he asked what a noise was mid-answer.

Q: How do you describe your vision?
A- “I describe it more as, well, I’m not colorblind.” He stated that he can see all the colors, all the color there is (through talking to his aide, I shared this with her and she said it was just shared that a classmate IS colorblind and he was discussing the fact that he isn’t with his mother. He shared that his right eye makes everything darker. “It darkens things.” He said his left eye is better and it’s the one he “focuses on”. Has worn glasses since he was 6 (2 years). We got into where he use to live...Background info to keep it more personal.

Q: How do you feel about art?
A- “I think art’s great. It’s a good thing.” He said he is good at it, he has talent in it, knows “how to do certain things properly”. He shared that is in one of the many things he is good at. (piano) It is evident that he has a high self-esteem. I could tell that he thought carefully before answering the questions and how to word his responses. He is well spoken for an eight-year-old. He possibly spends a great deal of time with adults? For the next question I recapped when I sat next to him when he was Star Artist and we talked as he worked. I wanted to use that time as background for the next few questions....(The Star Artist desk was moved to be directly under the ceiling light and he voiced his inability to “see” since it was too dark, his aide got the desk light from the classroom to plug in.)

Q: How does not having enough light a problem for you?
A- “If I drew a line I couldn’t see it if I was over there”...(He was describing and referring to his placement in the art room) We further discussed the special light in his classroom and I asked if he has one at home too. At home he said he has a lighted magnifier and described it. He said he could read up to 20/20 with it.

Q: You said light could be a problem for you during art class, what else could be a problem for you during art class?
A- After a long pause, I reworded the question→“Yeah, like doing something when I don’t understand how to do it and I’ve never done it before.”

Q: So what do you do if you don’t understand how to do something?
A- “Mrs. Sear...”*Began, and then was distracted by the buzzer to let someone in the office. It is evident that he is not as confident navigating around the office.
He seemed a little distracted from the noise but still did a good job at answering the questions. I refocused the question after explaining what the noise was, and asked how Mrs. Sear (aide) helps him...

- “Yeah, Mrs. Sear always tries” (answered weakly as if claiming that her intentions are there...) I commented that she is a nice lady and he responded, “Yeah, sometimes...” I laughed to keep the mood light, being aware that he likes to be “in control” of his time with Mrs. Sear. I told him he was funny. I could tell he was beginning to lose interest. Therefore, I tried to keep it simple...

Q: Do you ever get frustrated in art?
A- “Yeah, I get frustrated and don’t show it”. (redirect with, “although you might keep it in, what kinds of things might frustrate you?) he went off task and talked about if he is having a bad morning...I asked “what about in art?” and before I finished, he stated with absolute assurance, “Never in art. Art’s always happy.” After discussing it, I recapped that if he doesn’t understand something Mr. MacNeill has taught, it never frustrates him and he added that Mrs. Sear helps.

Q: What kinds of things does Mrs. Sear do for you?
A- “She helps me see things if I can’t see them.” (Ok, how does she do that?) Referred to how she was making the dot-to-dots for him to connect (during this morning’s lesson) She helps him know where things are. I brought up the paper she has to show him examples/demos of the skill.

Q: Do you think you could do your work on your own without her? Or do you think she is especially helpful in art?
A- “She is especially helpful in art.” He explained that he can do some subjects on his own. He explained that he is able to check out the board on his own (in regular classroom) and I reviewed that he is allowed to go up to the board in art as well. (He agreed)

- At the end of the interview I recapped what I wanted to accomplish from our meeting and what we would be discussing next time (use of colors, projects, etc).
- I felt him becoming more “antsy” toward the end of the interview since at this point he was realizing that recess was being cut short. (once the distraction occurred.)
- He is very open when answering questions. There appears to be arrogance about him. He views himself at a higher level than those who surround him. There were times during observation where he demonstrated a “Ha, bet you didn’t know that?!” quality, and a few times, actually said it. Modesty is not a strongpoint.
- I plan to look into how his “esteem” came about through talking to his parents. I believe from our prior, brief, conversation, that since the mother has the same disability and she received little support, that Bryan should not view himself as being “limited” to living a “normal” life.
2nd Interview
3/02/07
In the art room

-I got him from his room after he finished morning testing. My class was at Spanish. The art teacher (Jeff MacNeill) was prepping for his next class and on his way to lunch duty.

-I welcomed Bryan to another interview session and thanked him for his time. I told him that I might not have to meet with him many more times since we were almost done. I don’t want him to think that he will be missing more recesses and classroom time. I made small talk while I organized my notes and questions. We figured out where the tape recorder would work the best. He walked around the room, rubbing his eyes. To get ready it seemed.

-First before I ask you questions, I’d like you to describe the art room to me. What sort of things do you notice around the art room? (He starts to walk around the room and I call him back to carry the tape recorder with him as he walks.)

*There’s turquoise squares on the floor with a blue outlines with um... sort of a peachy-orange (on the floor?) like right on each corner (ok) that’s basically the floor. Ummm, the desks are like, this desk right here is sort of a brown (are they more like tables or desks?) more like tables, and umm they have stools instead of chairs (Hold it up to your mouth when you talk> voice becomes muffled> Hold it like you’re talking into a walkie-talkie.) Then there’s some buckets back here with things, one has things in it, stuff that an art room would have. So, and then you have the, the green board up front. It has pictures on it. (What kind of pictures?) Flowers, and things, it has the house here that we were working on last week. (I asked if he remembered doing some of the examples on the board in first grade. Jeff had them displayed for the 1st grade class due in next period after his lunch duty. Bryan remembered and commented on the projects.) And I remember doing the cloud picture in first grade.

(What about on the ceiling?) Yeah, (laughs) and there’s art on the ceiling. Tough for me to see from down here. (Do you know what kind of art is on the ceiling?) Nnmnmnnnn, it’s hard to see and I can see there are some animal and pictures. (okay) Maybe other things. I can’t really see it. (Too far away?) Yeah, it’s too hard. (Stops...) I’m just looking at something. (okay.) (He comments on a project of the fish made to look like tribal art, using Q-Tips as a paint brush) —I like that. (Did you do that yet? With the Q-Tips?) —recalls doing it, and that he really likes the student work displayed—We take a little time to discuss the colors and style... (Why do you like it?) Because it has colors and I like colors. It has all these different ones. (What shapes do you see in the picture?) Squares, circles, rectangles... (easily identifies shapes as he stand close to the picture) (What is it of?) It’s of a fish. Here’s another one like it. It’s nice. I’m just looking at some pictures.

(His tone is very matter-of-factly. He speaks as though he is comfortable and use to communicating with adults. I tell him one of the pictures was done by one of the students
Q: So you described the art room to me, ok? And you took a nice, little tour; you walked all around the art room. And you knew exactly where everything was because you've been here a bunch of times... Correct? ---
A: I've been here since last year.

Q: So far, you can do last year to, what was one of your favorite projects you did? Where you thought 'Wow, this is awesome!'

A: This is one of my favorite subjects

Q: (to redirect) But what about favorite project you did in art class? (He seemed a little unsure about what I was asking of him. So I recapped the house and pansy projects.)

A: The pansies because, because we got to use oil pastels and I thought that's cool that you can design things like that.
(His answers are a reflection of him not being focused. I can tell that he enjoys being in art and the art room and I think he is confused about how to act at this time. He is not as focused as he was during our last discussion.)

Q: Any other projects you really liked?
A: Well I do like the one we're working on now. (pointing at his drawing we have in front of us) This one. The Edward. Because it has all these different designs that you can make in it. You see how these different designs, you see that there are boards down, boards facing this way... Different shapes up here. La, la, la, la. (as he point to the shapes with his finger) Get it. (Got it.)

Q: What is your favorite thing to work with? Do you like markers, crayons, oil pastels, pencils, paint... What's your favorite thing to work with?
A: If I was working with anything... If I was writing with anything I would use like a marker. And of I was just drawing around I could use oil pastels or, ummm... What was some of the other ones? Yeah, paint. I would use paint. That's something I like too.

Q: Do you do art at home?
A: Sometimes. I have a big art set. Oh, yeah. I have a big art set. (sounds impressed)

Q: What kind of projects might you do at home? (rephrase) What things might you create at home?
A: Like what things might I create? Sometimes like create different cars. (I refer to our first discussion during the time he was Super Student and he told me about the game he has where he can customize cars. He seemed confused and then said it was a video game. Need for Speed etc.)
Q: Do you like cars? Do you usually draw cars?
A: Yeah, oh, yeah (enthusiastically) I'm drawing them all the time. If I draw somen'...I'm usually drawin' a car!

Q: Out of markers, pencils, and oil pastels, you told me what you like working with, but what is the hardest to see? What is the hardest to work with?
A: The hardest to work with, basically... (pauses to think after he rephrases the question as he often does.) I would think its something more as if, like something on, something soft like a crayon... (I redirect him back to the question and try to refocus his thoughts. So crayons are hard to see or hard to work with?) Sometimes hard to see and sometimes and crayons are like, they can be hard to see. You know a white crayon on a different background is hard to see, you know, like that. (his thoughts are drifting...)

*I ask him to take a look at his unfinished Hopper drawing.

Q: How do you think it's looking so far?
A: (immediately answers)-Great.
Q: Yeah, how come?
A: I think its looking great because (he moves the recorder and I tell him we will leave it between us. He tries to hold it up to his mouth like he did earlier.) Because it shows all these shapes in it. I like all the shapes we are using. And all these different designs and I like different designs.

Q: And how did you say Mrs. Sear helps you? Because there is a lot of pencil drawing (referring to this specific project) Do you use a different kind of pencil?
A: Yes. I use an art pencil.
Q: Where the lead is a little darker?
A: Yeah.
Q: Easier to see?
A: Yeah. And it's so dark, and Mrs. Sear gave me the regular (pencil) for certain things.
Q: And you did the dot-to-dot thing for this right? How does that help you?
A: The dot-to-dot-thing>? It helps me to where I can like go from one dot to the next so I don't make a mistake. And why it's a little confusing is; it can also get me confused by the line, it may get squiggly, cause I'm drawing crooked lines.
Q: It's difficult for you to draw straight lines?
A: Yeah, like if I'm drawing a line all the way across the page. It probably ain't going to be straight. You know? (says this after I hesitate to give a response.)

Q: What do your parents say about your art work when you bring it home?
A: Like fantastic ( Says 'fantastic' in a dramatic way as if to mimic them) They think I'm really good in art and I am really good in art.

Q: Do they hand your artwork somewhere special at home? Is there a special place for your artwork?
A: Oh yeah, there’s a special place for it. They already got a lot of my artwork. They are very happy with it.

Q: Do you ever talk about your artwork? Do you ever go to museums to see art?
A: I hardly do that type of stuff. I hardly go to museums.
Q: Well you have a baby sister right? So maybe it’s hard?
A: Well, another thing why I don’t do that is that we have a VERY busy schedule. (I laugh at his ‘adult like’ comments. He seems much more at ease and comical than the last interview. He seems to be very comfortable with me.) VERY busy. (He list girl scouts, the fact that he has piano lessons…) (Wow! You’re a busy guy!) EVERYTHING’S going on! This is like the place where everything’s GOING on. On, and on and on… (he drags it out knowing I got a kick out of it earlier.)
-I move along to discuss his White House drawing he did in his regular classroom for Presidents’ Day…

Q: Could you talk to me about your White House drawing?
A: Yeah. The reason why I did something like this is because I like red, white, and blue.
Q: And what was the project? What were you told to do?
A: Like if I was president I think? (I read back a portion to him. He typed it in brail and his aide wrote/interpreted above his markings—If I were president I would make laws like no drinking in cars. Another thing I’d need to do is explore the White House. It is always important for me to know how to get around. Also I would help fight to end the war in Iraq. I think it would be cool to be president; don’t you?

Q: Now what you wrote about that it’s important for me to know how to get around, why did you say that in your speech?
A: Because when visually impaired and visually impaired people need certain things to know how to get around. And if you don’t know a place or go to a place, it might be harder to get around.

Q: What sort of things can you do to help yourself get around?
A: I have my ability instructor. I have glasses to help me see better. That’s something that can help.

Here you have Mrs. Sear, right?
Yeah. But I know this building.
And next year you’ll have this building too.

I thanked him once again for being a big help and I walked him back to his room so he could get what he needed for lunch.

I need to touch up brief interviews with the classroom and art teachers and contact Bryan’s mom…
Brief Discussion with Lynn Peligrini (Classroom teacher)

*To collect additional background information

Lynn has been very accommodating. She sent home copies of the consent form to all of Bryan’s classmates and if they were not returned, she sent home another copy until she received all of them. I’ll catch her here and there in the hallway to let her know what I am working on. She provides me with insights to his behavior and relationships with his peers. Any information she gives me is helpful. I constantly tell her how grateful I am for her cooperation.

*The questions seem to jump around a little. I kept it more like a casual conversation and so the responses might have strayed a little from the original questions...

Q: How does he interact with other students?

She mentioned that for the most part, his classmates are at ease with his disability since they are a young age (more understanding). There might be some “tension” since he does have a tendency to overcompensate with a strong, seemingly positive personality. He does have issues with personal space since he is unable to see at distances. This causes some students to feel uncomfortable since he stands so close to them. She went on to describe that his high level of self esteem could be a problem for him down the road; possibly even next year. He may begin to drive students away and they might not be as willing to interact with him.

Q: What is his overall demeanor? (personality, attitude toward school...)

She responded that he “doesn’t quite see it” → meaning that he tends to not take it (school) that seriously. He thinks it’s play time. Since school (academic aspects) tends to come easily to him, he expects to get everything correct (100% on tests/work). In the even that his answers or responses might be wrong, he feels the need to “qualify” why he chose what he did (as if to all of a sudden, make it right).

Q: How would you describe Jane’s role/relationship with Bryan?

(I mentioned that Bryan appears to be very capable to kick off the question.) He is very capable. She guesses that his parents are very enabling at home. She describes Bryan and Jane’s relationship as positive in some ways and negative in others. Needs to hang back a little. Then she described that it must be tough for an aide to decide how/when to. (I could tell she didn’t really want to get into it and make it a venting opportunity of her thoughts.

Q: How independent is he (with his disability) How independent does he think he is?

She commented that he could be more independent than he is... (I asked about him at recess which we had discussed at an earlier time...) She said that at recess, sunlight can throw him off. He knows him limitations—go too far, run too fast. He tends to stay in the center of the field (outdoor recess is on a soccer field) (I asked how he knows when recess has ended?) If he hears the whistle for the classes to line up, classmates might tell him, “That’s us!” or he may come and ask her.
Q: How often does he receive Brail Instruction?

Brail lessons are 3x’s a week. Initially mom was an advocate for Brail and dad for computers, but mom seems to be realizing that (with technology changing) it might be needed as much as computers may be the way to go. Bryan is not fast enough to read the stories the class is reading but in Brail. All of the stories from the reading series have been translated into Brail. However, his Brail writing using the typewriter is coming along.

Q: Do you think his “high self esteem” was a taught behavior? (since mom has the same condition)

She replied that as a parent herself, it is hard to say. Bryan is very similar to his father. She went on to comment that it’s the old “Nature vs. Nurture” argument.

3/15/07
Interviewed Jeffrey MacNeill/ Building art teacher grades K-2

*It was a casual interview, more of a friendly discussion or Bryan’s experiences in the art room. Jeff was preparing for the first class of the day and setting up the room. I sat at an adjacent work desk to ask some questions.

I began with the question of the specific modifications made in the art room as per direction of Bryan’s 504he listed that Bryan is seated in the front row, close to the front of the room (and board where samples are), Bryan has his own sample on his desk/workspace made by Jeff or Jane, his desk is at an angle so his paper is close to his face thus, easier to see...He commented that he feels Jane does too much but it is human nature to help when it appears to be necessary. He said that usually he lets it go or indirectly tells her to let him try it on his own. I asked how he felt Bryan did with the Hopper lesson...He commented that he did “kinda” well, but it is apparent he has an aide.

Jeff added that HE doesn’t have to do as much to accommodate Bryan since Jane is already aware of how to adjust and modify. He said that he treats Bryan the same as any other student in the class. Bryan hands out papers and other supplies, gets to be “Star Artist”. Jeff said that he modifies if he sees him (Bryan) not getting something or if the aide can’t interpret the skill being taught. His main modification is having Bryan up front.

I asked about what the next project would be and Jeff was planning that as I was in the room. He said it would most likely be the tropical fish and using markers. We further discussed the project. I vaguely remembered so I was asking a little more about it. He said that he didn’t recall if Bryan had the opportunity to do a lot of cutting exercises and I reminded him of the brief Valentine creatures extra project. He said that there will be cutting in the future projects. We discussed how Bryan uses his left hand to guide as he cuts and how he asked me for assistance. *Jeff gave me the good idea to check with his OT (occupational therapist) to see what type of things she works on with him. Maybe he learned that skill from her???
3/19/07
Thoughts:

So far I am considering changing the title of my paper to: *Being Visually Impaired in an Elementary Art Classroom*. I feel this title is more conducive to the specifics of the study.

I also feel that I have gotten to learn a great deal about my subject, Bryan. I am discovering that although Bryan seems to be so independent and displays tendencies of a "know-it-all", he is okay with being provided with a lot of assistance. I have not seen him refuse any help or insist on doing something by himself. He appears willing to ask for assistance and demonstrates a “you work for me, and I know more than you, so prepare to be impressed” quality. He shows off a lot when I am sitting next to him in class. His aide, Jane, does not acknowledge it, she just moves along not feeding into his comments.

4/2/07
Phone Interview with Mrs. Woolbert (Bryan’s mom)

*I began with giving her an update of where I am in the project. I explained that I am in the final stages and need a little more “Bryan Background”.

I asked for some specifics of his condition: Micro-Ophthalmia/Cataract Syndrome. There are 3 symptoms: 1) the word itself means “small eyes” 2) cataracts grow on the eyes as a form of protection 3) misshapen irises. Apparently there are only roughly 22 reported cases in the world. When Bryan was a baby, he was an interesting case study to doctors in the hospital. However, after a little while, she stopped the research on her son.

She compared Bryan to kids who are totally blind. Said that he relies on the tiny bit of vision he does have. I talked about some things I have observed through working with him. For example, how he holds the colors (pastels, crayons, markers...) up to his eye to closely examine the colors and how he constantly felt the velour paper. She shared that he loves color. He had a bin of large bead and could just stare at all of the colors for hours.

I asked if he does art at home. She said that he does a lot of art at home. He has always been fascinated with (loved) things that move (trains, cars...she discussed the car designing game that he talked about with me). Interestingly enough, she said that most people would say to stay away from things like that since he never will be able to drive them.

I asked what type of feedback she gives him when he brings art home or shows what he has made. She said they are very encouraging and supportive and are glad he has a creative outlook. They buy him a lot of art supplies with colors ranging from dark-vivid. He can even see fine shadings of colors (encourage). She feels that most visually impaired kids don’t use vision but rely on their other senses. She feels it is a god stimulus for him and she is glad he uses it.
I asked her if he meets with the OT (occupational therapist) for his fine motor skills...She said that he already leaves the room 3x’s a week (Brail) and wanted to minimize the times he spends out of the classroom.

Mom admits to handling things a little differently. His social life is very important to her. He needs a full spectacle any other kid would have. She wants him to make friends, maybe date, and get married one day. And he won’t love an as normal life as possible if those things aren’t developed from the start. Some parents of visually impaired children only focus on the academics. She wants him to be well-rounded. But, as his mother, she will say that he is definitely hyper! I told her that he is good around adults and cracks me up with his words to “impress”.

I asked if she feels he needs an aide. She described that she was mainstreamed 36 years ago since aides weren’t even an option. She feels his aide takes the pressure off of the teacher and adapts the materials, but other than that, no. She feels he is doing great! (straight A’s) She joked that she is realistic that he can go from 12 years old to about 2 in 1 second.

*She recapped that his disorder is genetic and she had him when she was 35. It is a dominant gene and there is a 50% chance that his children will inherit it. Shared that her other child, Bryan’s sister who is in kindergarten, is fine.

Mini-Meeting
With Jane and Lynn
4/20/07

Main purpose was to follow up a question I had about Bryan’s behavior. I was wondering if he was as “comfortable” with Jane when she first started with him (comments, “know-it-all-ness”) as he was when I was 1x1 with him...
-Jane said at first, but it wasn’t too bad
-She shared a couple stories about when she first began.(When they both met with his brail teacher for the first time he asked her, “I have an IEP, do you know what that means?”—She also shared that one time on his bus there was a sub driver. He sits in the front anyway and was getting upset that the other kids on the bus wouldn’t “shut-up” so HE could tell her where to go)

Both Jane and Lynn shared that he is due for a fall-he is lucky that kids now are so accepting because 5th/6th grade is hard enough as it is. And that it WILL socially interfere in the future that he has such an overbearingly high self-esteem.---

Jane shared that he had been poking his eyes a lot lately-strain? Tired? She is urging him to close them to rest them when he does not need them so he doesn’t have to push on them-bad for his eyes...
-Jane and Lynn also shared some of the things he does and says—he is missing the reactions of his classmates if what he is doing isn’t “normal” kids behavior
-his “blindisms” include rocking and squirming—common things/actions but might not be so normal in the older grades—