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**Artmaking in School and its Impact on Student Wellbeing**

**Michaela Jane Latham**

**Bachelor of Arts/Bachelor of Teaching (Secondary)(Honours)**

**Thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree  
Undergraduate Honours**

**Faculty of Education  
Avondale College of Higher Education**

**October 2018**

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## **ABSTRACT**

Research into the wellbeing of young Australians has found that many students are struggling with their mental health. This can have a negative impact on their quality of life. This year the Australian government has acknowledged this issue and is providing funding to Beyondblue and Mindmatters so that they can develop wellbeing resources that can be used in schools.

The wellbeing programs that utilize these resources can be both proactive and reactive in nature. As students spend a significant amount of their school time within their various classes, attention has turned to how various school subjects can impact student wellbeing. One such subject is Visual Arts and this study explored the impact that studying Visual Arts has on students' wellbeing.

Based in the qualitative paradigm, the study explored the relationship between Visual Art and student wellbeing using a combination of case study and micro-ethnography methodologies. It found that involvement in Visual Art had a positive impact on the students' mental health and overall wellbeing. Through the semi-structured interviews, the students discussed multiple ways artmaking has helped them to counteract negative aspects of their lives. The study's findings aligned with past wellbeing research in finding that Art was able to provide students with positive emotions, engagement, positive relationships, accomplishments, meaning, grit, management strategies and a connection to nature. At a time when students are struggling with low levels of wellbeing, it would seem that Visual Arts is one subject that could play a role in improving the wellbeing of students in schools.

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## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

One in four of today's youth are at risk of serious mental illness (Bullock, Cave, Fildes, Hall, & Plummer, 2017), and over 50% of secondary students experience high levels of anxiety (Oster, Pearson, De Iure, McDonald & Wu, 2017, p. 1). As the majority of Australian youth are in the education system, the government is looking towards schools to help students struggling with their wellbeing (Scott & Kearney, 2018). This prompts the question as to what sort of help schools can provide?

The most effective wellbeing programs adopt a whole of school approach to help positively influence student wellbeing (Norrish, 2015). As students spend a significant amount of time in class for each key learning area, one possible solution for secondary teachers could be to explore how this time in class in their subject could assist in improving students' wellbeing.

One of the many subjects that students study during their secondary education is Visual Arts. This subject may be in a position to impact the wellbeing of students. But what form of contribution can Visual Arts make? Is it narrow in focus or broad? Can it help the few or the many? Involvement in Art has been found to have health benefits for a variety of individuals in different situations (Staricoff, 2006; Rusted, Sheppard & Waller, 2006; Potash, Ho, Chan, Wang, Cheng, 2014). Therefore, the purpose of this research inquiry is to investigate how Visual Arts can impact the wellbeing of students. It will seek to explore student wellbeing and how Visual Arts could aid in resolving wellbeing issues. Therefore, the focus question driving this research inquiry is:

*What impact does artmaking in school have on two senior high school student's wellbeing?*

### **Background: The Push to Improve Student Wellbeing**

When looking at the latest reports on wellbeing in Australia it appears that Australians generally enjoy good levels of social connections, education, housing, employment, income, and security, and these factors contribute to a good quality of life (OECD, 2017). But in a fast-paced western society, things can change. One factor that is of particular concern is the levels of mental health in Australia, especially amongst children.

Globally it is estimated that 4.4% of the world's population suffer from common mental disorders. In Australia, around half of our population will suffer from a mental disorder during their lifetime (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2018). The two most common disorders are anxiety and depression. The World Health Organization has recognised depression as, "the single largest contributor to global disability" (World Health Organization, 2017, p. 5). For Australian students it appears that anxiety is the most common mental disorder affecting their quality of life, with over 50% of students in the NAB Independent Schools Survey reporting high levels of anxiety (Oster, Pearson, De Iure, McDonald & Wu, 2017). The authors' of the 2017 NAB Independent Schools Survey reflect over the causes of this increase.

"Almost daily, there are reports in the media highlighting the growing challenges facing our children arising from globalisation, the future of work, housing affordability and cost of living pressures, terrorism, climate change, global economic uncertainty, declining levels of literacy and numeracy relative to some countries, cyberbullying and family breakdown to name just a few. So perhaps it's no surprise children are anxious". (Oster, Pearson, De Iure, McDonald & Wu, 2017, p. 1).

In response to these levels of wellbeing, the Australian Government has granted funding to develop wellbeing resources and implement wellbeing programs and headspace centres in Australian schools. Mental health initiatives such as Mind Matters and Beyond Blue will receive funding to provide independent and public schools with wellbeing programs and resources (Scott & Kearney, 2018).

The NAB Independent Schools Survey 2017, identified that the majority of independent schools are aware of student wellbeing concerns and have already implemented wellbeing initiatives in an effort to address the issue (Oster, Pearson, De Iure, McDonald & Wu, 2017, p. 1). The NSW Education Standards Authority (NESA) has integrated wellbeing into the current PEHPE draft syllabus. However, there is concern about the effectiveness of integrating wellbeing resources into this subject alone as changing levels of students' wellbeing is best served through a whole of school approach (Mindmatters, 2018).

Students are also concerned about their wellbeing. When asked to list their top personal issue, mental health made the top of the list (Bullot, Cave, Fildes, Hall, & Plummer, 2017). The Mission Australia's Youth Survey 2017 found that students do seek out their

teacher for support with matters like their health (Bullock, Cave, Fildes, Hall, & Plummer, 2017). Therefore, within a whole of school approach, equipping all teachers with skills to reactively support students, and examining the proactive contribution that each school subject could make towards increasing student wellbeing could be important strategies that schools should adopt.

### **Rational: Art and Wellbeing In Education**

This study proposes that participation in school subjects can impact levels of student wellbeing. The National Art Education Association (2016) and Australian Curriculum (2018) believe that studying Visual Arts will provide students with the skills and knowledge that assists them to become productive members of society. The Visual Arts class also has the potential to positively impact a student's wellbeing. Arts ability to influence wellbeing was discovered in the 1940s. Art therapy has been used to improve mood, cognition and behaviour of dementia patients in a nursing home (Rusted, Sheppard & Waller, 2006) and positively influenced the subjective wellbeing of elderly women, who had taken up artmaking in their retirement (Reynolds, 2010). Sandmire, Rankin, Gorham, Eggleston, French, Lodge, Grimm (2015) directed a study at a university to explore the effects of artmaking on college-aged students. Over 40 students were asked to participate in 30-minute art-making and control sessions with no artmaking. The study found that the artmaking sessions had a positive impact on student anxiety (Sandmire et al., 2015).

Through these studies, we see how art can impact the wellbeing of different individuals in different settings. With levels of student wellbeing declining it is timely that this study explores the impact of studying art on student wellbeing in a school environment. In particular, it will seek to answer the following sub-questions:

1. Do students experience a connection between their artmaking and wellbeing?
2. Has their artmaking helped them to feel more positive about life?
3. Do schools provide a good environment for students' artmaking?

### **Methodology**

To find answers to these questions this research inquiry was designed around a bricolage (Rogers, 2012) of methodologies in the qualitative paradigm (Hennink et al., 2015). The bricolage utilised both case study and micro-ethnography methodologies to provide a multi-perspectival approach to uncovering the meaning behind people's everyday life experiences with visual arts (Given, 2008). The aim of using a case study approach combined

with micro-ethnography was to create a descriptive account of the participant's experiences of a phenomenon (Mills, Durepos & Wiebe, 2010) within a social setting (Given, 2008). It also aimed to expose areas of interest that could require further investigation and develop into new ideas to explore (Hodkinson & Hodkinson, 2001). By collectively using semi-structured interviews, a reflective journal and the tools of grounded theory, the research inquiry gained a holistic and accurate interpretation of the participant's accounts. The semi-structured interviews will applied a flexible collection method with the freedom to explore in depth the participant's responses (Given, 2008). While the reflective journal created a continuous process of examination and explanation of thoughts and opinions (Mills, Durepos & Webe, 2010). To ensure the deeper understanding of the data the coding process utilised the tools of grounded theory, which aided in development of theory from the data (Charmaz, 2014). These methods combined to ensure the research inquiry accurately identified what occurred within the participant's experiences with visual arts, and helped transition their tacit knowledge into explicit knowledge (Coghlan & Brydon-Miller, 2014).

### **Site and Respondents**

This research inquiry took place over a 6-month period which involved collecting data from a relevant source to the research topic (Given, 2008). Therefore, secondary students who were enrolled in Visual Arts and who volunteered to discuss their experience with art in the school environment were included in the study. The aim was to include students from a local Australian high school of both genders to represent both male and female views. The chosen school was selected as a sample of convenience (Marshall, 1996) due to its geographical location and ability to provide access to students and facilities. To ensure the data was holistic and accurate, obtaining access to the school's visual arts classroom was vital to maintaining the natural setting for the participants. This ensured that students felt comfortable, could act in a natural manner, and provide accurate participant accounts which provided authenticity and trustworthiness within data.

### **Structure of the Thesis.**

The thesis was structured so as to clearly present the methodology, results and conclusions. It is separated into six chapters. They are:

**Chapter 1** introduces the research question for the study and provides an introduction into the topic of wellbeing through exploring background information to the study. It also provides a rationale for the study and a brief summary of how the study was conducted.

**Chapter 2** provides a review of the literature on wellbeing and artmaking. This allows a deeper exploration on the topic of wellbeing and why it is a concern in current society. Furthermore, it looks specifically at student wellbeing and what schools are currently doing to help improve their student's wellbeing. It also explores how art has been used to influence an individual's wellbeing and provides an insight into how artmaking may influence student wellbeing in the Visual Art classroom.

**Chapter 3** explores the methodological framework used to conduct the study. It explains the choices behind the methods and design element used, which will provide a clear and true interstation of the participants experience with artmaking and their wellbeing.

**Chapter 4** aims to present the data collected through the semi-structured interviews. It introduces you to the students in the study and explore their life journeys. It then presents the different themes that emerged through the data collection and analysis.

**Chapter 5** provides a discussion of the different themes and factors that the students identified during their interviews. It compares the data to the literature and aims to enhance our understanding of the relationships discovered in the study.

**Chapter 6** is the concluding chapter and answers the main research question and provides recommendations for schools to explore. It also discusses the limitations of the study gives ideas for future research.

## CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

### **The Problem With Wellbeing In Our Nation And In Our Schools**

Wellbeing is a currently a concern in Australia. Almost half (45%) of the Australian population is likely to experience a mental health condition within their lifetime (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2018). Each year around 1 in 5 Australians will experience a mental illness. The most common in Australia is anxiety, however, many people suffering from anxiety also develop depression and vice versa (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2009). Around 8.6 million people live with anxiety or depression in Australia, which impacts their relationships, carers and overall wellbeing (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2018). However, only 35% will seek out help (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2008).

Mental health can often be a risk factor for suicide, which has become a major issue in Australia (Slade, Johnston, Teesson, Whiteford, Burgess, Pirkis, Saw, 2009; Beyond Blue, 2018), as suicide kills around 3,000 Australians every year. What is most alarming, is that suicide is the main killer of young Australians (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2015). It is the largest cause of death for Australians aged 25 – 44 and second for those aged 15 – 24 (Black Dog Institute, 2013). A reason for these high rates could be that many permanent mental health problems often begin before the age 14, and 75% of all mental health problems develop before the age 25 (Kessler, et al., 2005).

Young Australians are concerned about this issue and place a very high value on their mental health. In the Mission Australia's Youth Survey 2017, the participants were asked what they believed were the "most important issues in Australia today" (Bullock, Cave, Fildes, Hall, & Plummer, 2017, p. 4). Mental health was identified as the top issue followed by "alcohol and drugs and equity and discrimination" (Bullock, Cave, Fildes, Hall, & Plummer, 2017, p. 4). The participants were also asked about their barriers to post-school goals and mental health was consistently mentioned and youth placed "stress, school or study problems and body image" in their "top three issues of concern" (Bullock, Cave, Fildes, Hall, & Plummer, 2017, p. 3).

These results are supported by the NAB Independent Schools Survey 2017, that found that 50.4% of the students reported having anxiety. The NAB survey found that secondary students have significantly lower levels of wellbeing compared to primary students, and that anxiety is a greater issue with female students than male students (Oster, Pearson, De Iure, McDonald & Wu, 2017). Secondary students in their lives placed greater emphasis on factors

such as their looks and school results, compared to primary students (Oster, Pearson, De Iure, McDonald & Wu, 2017). These results from these and similar studies indicate that societal and school pressures have a great impact on youth and contribute to low levels of wellbeing in school students. What is most alarming is that the youth suffering from mental health issues are less likely to seek help than any other age group (Slade, Johnston, Teesson, Whiteford, Burgess, Pirkis, et al., 2009). The challenge before us is to help Australia's youth, who do not seek our help, and find ways to enhance their wellbeing.

### **How To Improve Our Wellbeing**

There are a variety of factors that contribute to positive levels of wellbeing. However, before discussing how to improve wellbeing, let us first seek to understand what wellbeing is. Defining wellbeing has proven difficult due to its many definitions and theoretical constructs (Dodge, Daly, Huyton, & Sanders, 2012). It has often been referred to as a synonym for happiness (Kahneman, 1999). Martin Seligman (2011) discussed the idea of it being a construct created by different elements that contribute to a person's state of being.

Although defining wellbeing is a challenge (Dodge, Daly, Huyton, & Sanders, 2012), a number of definitions acknowledge the importance of a personal satisfaction, contentment and balance in life (McCallum, 2017). The theory of equilibrium understands the complex construct of wellbeing, and the different components that it includes, and uses the meta-position of discussing wellbeing in reference to a person's quality of life. It explores how the "personality, life events, wellbeing and illbeing" can affect a person's quality of life (Dodge, Daly, Huyton, & Sanders, 2012, p. 226) and how an individual's wellbeing has a neutral level and returns to this level after a major life event. As individuals experience a change in their lives, they use wellbeing resources to aid in balancing their wellbeing. It is this equilibrium and balance that leads to a high quality of life. Shin and Johnson (1978) first proposed the idea that wellbeing can be described as the quality of a person's life 40 years ago, which led others, such as Zikmund (2003), to make the connection between the concept of wellbeing and quality of life. Although, there has been continuous research into wellbeing over the years there is still "no agreed definition or meaning" for wellbeing (Rees, Goswami, & Bradshaw, 2010).

Many researchers have explored the concept of wellbeing to investigate what contributes to a person's quality of life and how to improve it. Abraham Maslow (1943, 1954) discussed how there are certain needs that are vital to a person's quality of life and that



people are motivated to achieve them. He found that after completing each need people are driven to complete the next. This prompted the creation of Maslow's hierarchy of needs, which includes five needs; physiological needs, safety needs, love/belonging, esteem and self-actualization (Maslow, 1943; Maslow, 1954). However, when one of these needs is denied or taken away, a person can begin to fluctuate between the needs and alters their quality of life (McLeod, 2007).

Martin Seligman (2011, 2018) proposed a wellbeing theory that elaborates on the top three needs of Maslow's hierarchy. In his wellbeing theory he discusses five elements, which include "positive emotion, engagement, meaning, positive relationships, and accomplishment" (Seligman, 2011, p. 26). He found that people throughout life seek to pursue each of these elements and when they are unmet or achieved they impact a person's quality of life. Seligman's five elements are described in the PERMA acronym and by developing each of these elements, Seligman believes a person can move beyond a basic level of wellbeing and begin to flourish (Seligman, 2011). The first element, positive emotion, explores the idea that positive emotions aid with providing happiness, and those people who experience more positive emotion will report feeling more satisfied with their lives. The second element is engagement, which is about applying yourself to a meaningful activity to experience a sense of enjoyment and flow (Seligman, 2011). Csikszentmihalyi (1997) looked deeply into this area and explored how people can enter a state of flow when full immersed in a meaningful activity. Flow is a state that is created when a person is engaged in an activity that challenges our skills and has a connection to our lives. Csikszentmihalyi (1997) believes by engaging in activities that can generate flow, can improve a person's wellbeing.

Relationships is the third element in PERMA and looks at the social tendencies of humans and how we crave social connection. By having positive relationships that provide a sense of love, we can gain a higher sense of flourishing (Seligman, 2011). The next element is meaning, which Seligman refers to as having a sense of belonging and serving something greater than yourself. By finding meaning we can gain a sense of purpose for our lives. The final element is accomplishment, the ability to positively impact our lives regardless of positive emotion and engagement. By setting and completing goals in our life we can gain a sense of accomplishment, which can help us to flourish.

Roger Walsh (2011) largely agrees with Seligman's five elements but also reports that having a healthy life style can aid in reducing negative emotions and stress. He explains eight therapeutic lifestyle changes to help improve wellbeing. In addition to the factors already outlined in PERMA, Walsh discusses the impact of time in nature, religious/spiritual involvement and relaxation and stress management (Walsh, 2011). Time in nature is one therapy that can improve your cognitive function and aid in relaxation, with no negative side effects (Walsh, 1999; Berman, Jonides, & Kaplan, 2008). Research has discovered that religion and spirituality have a positive influence on a person's quality of life and aid in building positive relationships and improving mental health (Koenig, 2009; Walsh, 2011). Walsh (2011) also discussed how chronic stress can have a major impact on your mental and physical health, and many people are not equipped to deal with stress. Walsh recommends that we should develop self-management skills to help combat stress and help people to relax.

### **School Based Wellbeing Programs**

Schools can run a variety of wellbeing programs to assist with positively influencing students' levels of wellbeing. Currently, the government is placing a large amount of funding into wellbeing programs and headspace centres for schools. Government supported initiatives such as Mindmatters and Beyond Blue are receiving funding to provide both independent and public schools with programs and resources to improve student's mental health and overall wellbeing (Scott & Kearney, 2018). While student wellbeing is a very clear issue "most schools are not only aware of this issue but proactive in attempting to manage it" (Oster, Pearson, De Iure, McDonald & Wu, 2017, p. 1). The NAB Independent Schools Survey 2017 found that 87% of the independent schools surveyed had wellbeing programs in place (Oster, Pearson, De Iure, McDonald & Wu, 2017).

As concern for students' wellbeing grows and governments look to support student wellbeing programs, the NSW Education Standards Authority (NESA) has integrated a large focus on wellbeing in the current PEHPE draft syllabus. The school subject has taken on a large role in supporting student wellbeing, aiming to help students "protect and enhance their own and others' health, safety and wellbeing" (NSW Education Standards Authority, 2017, p. 8). However, the Mindmatters team claims that wellbeing needs to be a whole school approach and not integrated into one subject (Mindmatters, 2018).

The Mission Australia's Youth Survey 2017 reported that four out of ten students go to their teacher for support with important issues (Bullot, Cave, Fildes, Hall, & Plummer,

2017). It would seem that all teachers, in all subject areas, could play a role in supporting their students' wellbeing as we acknowledge the "important role schools" play in helping students "not only academically, but also emotionally" (Oster, Pearson, De Iure, McDonald & Wu, 2017, p. 1). But what would a whole of school wellbeing program look like?

Geelong Grammar is one school that has implemented a wellbeing program to attempt to address the current low levels of students' wellbeing (Norrish, 2015). In 2008, Martin Seligman collaborated with Geelong Grammar to create 'Positive Education', a wellbeing program that is designed to benefit all at the school. Students, teachers, staff and the school community are all involved in learning how to flourish by using the model of positive education, which is based of Seligman's PERMA model (Seligman, Ernst, Gillham, Reivich & Linkins, 2009) with the additional of Health as the sixth element (Norrish, 2015). Through this model they aim to teach valuable skills for happiness, mental health and overall wellbeing. They achieve this by placing wellbeing at the centre of education and imbedding it into all subjects, as well as providing Positive Education classes (Norrish, 2015).

Adventist Schools Australia is another education system that understands the need to improve student wellbeing and has already incorporated a wellbeing focus into their schools. They also believe that to successfully improve the wellbeing of their students they must have a whole-school approach, which links the curriculum, school environment and community (ACU and Erebus International, 2008). Examples of Adventist school wellbeing programs are the Invictus program (Brown, 2016) and the Learning for Life Program (Robinson, 2008). These programs encompass a wide variety of elements, which includes providing explicit wellbeing intervention, outdoor education, quality KLAs, spiritual programs and counselling programs. Furthermore, they also recognise the need to regularly measure wellbeing of students to assist with evaluating and improving their programs.

What is most interesting when exploring wellbeing programs at both Geelong Grammar and various Adventist Schools is that these programs are based on the premise that wellbeing is best addressed through a whole-school approach. Where possible these programs seek to improve wellbeing by having explicit wellbeing classes and instruction and also integrating wellbeing principles throughout the subjects taught at the school rather than just relying on having a single wellbeing lesson (Norrish, 2015; Beamish, 2018). There are some distinct advantages for the students. Wilms, (2014) found that there is a link between engagement, wellbeing and academic outcomes. Engaged students have higher levels of

wellbeing and do better academically. It would seem that focusing on providing quality in the school's subjects can lead to higher levels of engagement, achievement and wellbeing for students (Gore, Lloyd, Smith, Bowe, Ellis and Lubans, 2017). But what contribution can each subject area make? In particular, what role can Art as a subject in school play in impacting student wellbeing?

### **A Quality Key Learning Area - Art In Education**

Visual Arts is a mandatory subject in the junior years and an elective for the senior years of high school. Art has a rich history in education and its importance was recognised as early as the end of the Baroque period in the 1740s (Kuyumcu, 2012). Over the years as society and culture has changed art education has continued to evolve. The National Art Education Association (2016) in America discusses how today's youth live in the visual age and are "saturated in images" (p. 1). This visual age has created a demand for new skills and knowledge (National Art Education Association, 2016). To completely understand the visual age, Robert Sabol (2011) claims it is crucial that everyone receives an art education, as it will provide students with the skills and knowledge to live in the visual world.

The Australian Curriculum (2018) and The National Art Education Association (2016) claims that students will develop, observation, problem-solving, reflective, innovative, critical, and creative thinking skills through art education. The curriculum also states that students will "develop an understanding of world culture and their responsibilities as global citizens" (Australian Curriculum, 2018). Both National Art Education Association (2016) and The Australian Curriculum (2018) appear to express the importance of art in education and how the skills developed through art education will enable students to become productive members of society as critical thinkers and creative problem solvers. It would seem that Visual Art as a subject could play a role in a holistic school approach to improving student wellbeing.

### **How Can Art Benefit Wellbeing?**

Art has been used to benefit individuals through its visual aesthetics and as a positive activity throughout history. There have been a variety of studies which have explored the impact art's visual aesthetics have on an individual's wellbeing. It appears that simply looking at art can improve your wellbeing. A few studies in medical settings have explored how artworks can help improve the wellbeing of patients. Nanda, Eisen, Zadeh and Owen (2010) conducted a study at the East Alabama Hospital that investigated how agitation and

anxiety levels of patients were affected by different artworks. Over 2 months 3 different artworks were put on display in a multi-purpose lounge for the patients. An abstract painting, abstract-representational painting and a realistic nature photography were displayed in rotation. For the last 3 weeks of the 2 months, no artwork was displayed. The experiment considered feedback from nurses and analysed medication dispensed for anxiety and agitation which was significantly lower on days with the natural artwork. During the period of nature art, the medication cost was “\$15,272” while the abstract artworks and no art days resulted in medication costing between \$31,000 - \$38,510 (Nanda, Eisen, Zadeh & Owen, 2010, p. 7).

Eisen, Ulrich, Shepley, Varni and Sherman (2008) conducted a similar experiment using only children participants. Based on past studies success with adult participants, the study aimed to explore if natural art had the same effect on children aged 5 – 17 in paediatric health. The study found that the children participants prefer nature art compared to abstract, impressionistic or animal subject matter. Nature art appeared to have a positive effect on their wellbeing, showing improvements in their blood pressure and respiratory rates (Eisen, Ulrich, Shepley, Varni & Sherman, 2008). However, Eisen, Ulrich, Shepley, Varni and Sherman (2008) identified other variables from the paediatric health setting that influenced the participant's wellbeing. The children throughout their stay were provided with activities such as artmaking and other social activities. The authors found that the social support had the biggest influence on the participant's wellbeing. The studies both concluded nature subject matter had positive outcomes on the patient's wellbeing.

While looking at and appreciating art can influence wellbeing, it has been discovered that being involved in the artmaking process can also increasingly improve your wellbeing. Artmaking as an activity has been utilised since the 1940's as a tool to improve wellbeing. This type of artmaking is known as art therapy (Waller & Gilroy, 1978). Adrian Hill an artist from the UK, discovered the healing potential of art while recovering from tuberculosis. He used drawing and painting as a therapeutic process to engross his mind, claiming it enables the individual “to build a strong defence against his misfortunes” (Hill, 1948, p. 103). During the same period a psychologist in the USA, Margaret Naumberg, also began to utilise the benefits of art in her work. However, Naumberg utilised art as a method of communication between client and therapist rather than a therapeutic process (Edwards, 2004).

Art therapy has come to be described as a process that encourages personal development, self-expression, emotional expression and reflection through artmaking for a

variety of individuals (Edwards, 2004). This therapeutic process has been used since the 1940's to improve individual's wellbeing through relieving negative aspects like stress, anxiety and mood (Staricoff, 2006; Rusted, Sheppard & Waller, 2006; Potash, Ho, Chan, Wang, Cheng, 2014).

There have been several studies exploring the healing benefits of art therapy in hospital settings. Staricoff (2006) conducted a study at the Chelsea and Westminster Hospital, which explored the use of art therapy versus no art therapy. The patients who received art therapy were significantly more likely to result in positive improvements to their wellbeing than those who received no art therapy. The therapy resulted in the improvement of patient's vital signs, cortisol related stress, and a reduction of sleep medication (Staricoff, 2006). Rusted, Sheppard and Waller (2006) also used art therapy to improve the mood and cognition of elderly suffering from dementia. They conducted a study in a residential care setting that compared art therapy with activity groups that did not have an emphasis on "emotional expression" (Rusted, Sheppard & Waller, 2006, p. 517). The results not only found that art therapy improved the mood and cognition of the participants but also improve their behaviour throughout the broader day (Rusted, Sheppard & Waller, 2006). Each of these studies saw an improvement in the wellbeing of their participants by having them involved in art.

The success of art therapy has seen an abundance of research into the benefits of involvement in art, and how art can have a positive interaction with an art maker. John Pauley (2016) expresses that the artmaking process can encourage the artist to endeavour on a journey of self-development. By engaging in artmaking, the artist can enhance their self-knowledge and become an "I-Witness" to their personal development (Pauley, 2016, p76). Eugene Selk (2016), also discusses three values of art that can benefit an individual. The first value he discusses is fulfilment, which expresses that artmaking can provide an individual with a sense of satisfaction. The second value explores the idea as art as an escape, that enables an individual to escape from "everyday routine and anxiety" (Selk, 2016, p83). The last value he discus states that art can promote mental health by restoring "a sense of balance and perspective" (Selk, 2016, p. 79). These benefits have been explored through countless studies in a variety of settings, to see what artmaking does for different people in different environment.

Following on from the success of art therapy, there has been numerous studies that have explored the benefits of creative arts in conjunction with the wellbeing of elderly, youth,

patients and students. Frances Reynolds (2010) conducted a study that aimed to explore how art-making influences the subjective wellbeing of elderly women. Thirty-two women aged between 60 – 86 participated in a series of interviews, aiming to identify their motivation for engaging in the arts. Majority of the participants reported that they took up art-making after their retirement and almost all claimed they were amateurs. The women also varied in art-making practice. The art-making practices explored in the study included “various forms of painting (on paper, canvas, lampshades, or tiles), pottery, textile art, card-making, weaving, lace-making, and other arts and crafts made primarily for aesthetic... purposes” (Reynolds, 2010, p. 137). Reynolds uncovered that the woman’s engagement in art-making was resulting in enriching their mental life and aiding them in finding a connection. The women claimed that art-making also enhanced their levels of satisfaction, positive emotions, social connections and provided them with opportunities to learn and develop (Reynolds, 2010).

The growing recognition that the creative arts has received in aiding the healing process, has seen an increasing number of art programs being utilised in the medical field (Stuckey & Nobel, 2010). Ross, Hollen and Fitzgerald (2006) conducted the long-term study that explored an “Arts-in-Medicine Program in an outpatient haemodialysis unit” (Ross, Hollen & Fitzgerald, 2006, p. 462). It implemented a range of art interventions; including artmaking, crafts, poetry and music. They assessed 46 participants by using surveys, Beck Anxiety Inventory, “dialysis times, interdialytic weight gain, and predialysis laboratory results” (Ross, Hollen & Fitzgerald, 2006, p. 465). At 6 months the participants reported to have “improved quality-of-life measures,” and showed “improvements in depression and certain laboratory and haemodialysis parameters” (Ross, Hollen & Fitzgerald, 2006, p. 467). The art-in-medicine programs are an example of how artmaking can have a positive effect on an individual with low aspects of wellbeing.

Walsh, Martin and Schmidt (2004) have also used artmaking interventions similar to the art-in-medicine programs to improve individuals state of wellbeing in a hospital setting. They explored the impact of art making interventions on stress, anxiety and emotions of forty family caregivers of cancer patients. The participants were involved with several creative art interventions for 6 months at a regional cancer treatment centre. The study concluded that the creative art interventions provided positive short-term wellbeing for the participants. The caregivers reported a significant decrease in their stress, anxiety and an increase of positive emotions (Walsh, Martin & Schmidt, 2004).

Not all studies have found a positive link between art and wellbeing. David Bayles and Ted Orland (2001) discuss some negative consequences of the artmaking process. In their book, 'Art and Fear' they describe art-making as a common human activity which is accompanied with many rewards and difficulties. One of the difficulties they explored was experiencing uncertainty and self-doubt, which can prevent many people from engaging in the artmaking process (Bayles & Orland, 2001). Rachel Williams (2008) also uncovered that self-doubt was an obstacle that plagued the students in her study. When asked to complete an artmaking activity, the students showed signs of distress. Even after being provided with encouragement and examples, they still found it difficult to overcome their self-doubt (Williams, 2008). Artmaking is "often filled with self-doubt" and can be a long process (Grushka, 2009, p. 248) which could be viewed as a battle between your fears and "your own work" (Bayles & Orland, 2001, p. 1).

When artists are battling with self-doubt they can begin questioning their talent and feared they do not have the abilities to produce quality art. This can result in making them feel "self-conscious about their artmaking" (Bayles & Orland, 2001, p. 31). Kathy Miraglia (2008) had a similar reaction from the participants in her study, which explored preservice teachers' attitudes towards art. The study discovered that self-doubt and low confidence impacted their perception of their abilities and possibly further participation in art (Miraglia, 2008). When the participants were asked why they reacted in this manner there were four responses; lack of knowledge; fear of mistakes and taking risks; history of negative responses and; lack of instruction and unsure of the criteria. Due to these reasons the participants not only experienced self-doubt and low confidence, but also anxiety (Miraglia, 2008). Metcalf and Smith-Shank (2001) found that anxiety was also common among their participants during artmaking. Due to arts ambiguity and need for risk taking, those participants with low confidence would do anything to avoid discomfort caused by art (Metcalf & Smith-Shank, 2001). However, these difficulties are normal with any activity, as they are a part of the human nature. Confronting these fears can be the answer to surviving as an artist (Bayles & Orland, 2001).

If an individual has the perseverance to push through their fears and negative emotions, Angela Duckworth (2016) would say they show signs of grit. Grit is a concept that refers to having passion and perseverance for long term and meaningful goals. When faced with a challenge an individual will feel a passion to persevere and push through the obstacles. However, it does not refer to passion as intense emotions but rather as a determination to stay



committed to a task even if it is dull or difficult. Duckworth (2016) believes that grit is important as it is the driving force for success and achievement. It is not about talent or intelligence. Grit is about effort and without it a talent could never develop into a meaningful skill. Having the ability to put in the commit to things of importance and be resilient to failure, is an essential factor for success in one's life (Duckworth 2016). As Bayles and Orland (2001) said, the key to successes as an artist is to push through your fears.

### **Art and Wellbeing in Education**

Art has also been found to have a positive effect in school settings. Artmaking has a strong link with wellbeing, which can help students with self-regulation, engagement and participation in school (Kindekens, Reina, De Backer, Jeltsen Peeters , Buffel & Lombaerts, 2013). Vicky Karkou (2009) explored the positive impact of art therapy in education settings. She conducted a study on how art making can improve the wellbeing of students who had learning difficulties and had been subjected to stress or trauma. Five students aged 10 to 14 participated in the study which involved integrating art therapy into their coursework. The study found art making enhanced their emotional wellbeing. It provided them with a sense of control and decreased "their sense of helplessness" (Karkou, 2010, p.157). Sandmire, Rankin, Gorham, Eggleston, French, Lodge, Grimm (2015) conducted a mixed method study at the University of New England. The study explored the effects of art making on college-aged students anxiety. Over forty participated in the study and attended 30-minute art-making sessions which included; colouring in mandala designs, modelling with clay, and free-form painting (Sandmire et al., 2015). The participants also attended a control session which "included identical tests, timelines and group sizes, with social interaction but no art making" (Sandmire et al., 2015, p. 563). The study concluded that all three forms of artmaking had a positive result on anxiety compared to the control session. However, the free-form painting was the only session to have a significant decrease in student's anxiety (Sandmire et al., 2015). Through these studies, it is evident that art can have a positive effect on student's wellbeing in an education setting and if utilised effectively could help improve the overall wellbeing of students.

### **Conclusion**

The research literature supports the importance of art in today's society and educational institutions. Research has highlighted the impact of art through its ability to impart valuable skills and improve people's wellbeing. These studies provide strong evidence that art can benefit an individual's wellbeing in a variety of settings.

At a time when levels of student wellbeing are declining, and governments are looking to schools to enhance student wellbeing, involvement in art maybe one way that Australian schools can improve student wellbeing.

While it appears, there is a large amount of research into art and wellbeing, most of the reports and information provided have been conducted overseas in America or the UK. Furthermore, most of the studies conducted were in medical settings and only a small few in education. In particular, there appears to be a lack of research into the effects of involvement in art on the wellbeing of students in a secondary education setting. Such research is needed to fully understand how artmaking is currently having an impact on the wellbeing of students.

The next chapter will explore the methodological approach, investigation and the collection and analysis of data. It will focus on creating a quality methodological approach to explore the role of art in secondary education as we seek to understand the effect art making has upon students' subjective wellbeing in the secondary classroom.

## CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

### Introduction

This chapter outlines the methodological approach which will be undertaken to explore the link between visual arts and student wellbeing. The study will be set within a qualitative paradigm. This will allow for the exploration of the knowledge, values and understating of students and their experience within visual arts (Given, 2008). Due to the complexity of the human experience, obtaining a holistic account of the selected phenomenon could prove difficult by using only one methodological approach (O'Reilly & Kiyimba, 2015). Therefore, a bricolage of methodologies will be utilised to provide a “multi-perspectival, multi-theoretical and multi-methodological approach” to the inquiry (Rogers, 2012, p. 1). The elements that construct the bricolage for this inquiry include; a case study (Yin, 2003) and aspects of micro-ethnography (Garcez, 1997). These methodologies will aid in providing a holistic perspective on the research question: What impact does art making in school have on two senior high school students' perceptions of their wellbeing?

### Qualitative Paradigm

The qualitative paradigm is a term used to describe a variety of approaches used to research in the social sciences (Flick, 2007). It focuses on people's perspectives of “everyday practices and everyday knowledge” (Flick, 2007, p. 2). Due to the nature of qualitative research, it uses “text as empirical material” unlike the quantitative paradigm which uses numbers, to explore the field of study (Flick, 2007, p. 2). The qualitative process turns “field notes, interviews, conversations, photographs, recordings, and memos to the self” into representations of the word (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. 3). Flick (2007), states that the methods used such as those listed above, should be appropriate for the area of study and aim to obtain understanding about a “process or relation” (p. 2). From what has been discussed it appears a qualitative researcher's main agenda is to discover the meanings and understandings of individuals everyday life experiences (Given, 2008). Due to its nature, qualitative research is not limited to sociology, but also can be used in education and number of other fields (Flick, 2007).

A qualitative researcher can explore the everyday world through two different qualitative inquiries, interpretive or naturalistic (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). Interpretive inquiry seeks to gain an understanding of the “meanings, purposes, and intentions” people

associate with their everyday experiences. Naturalistic inquiry explores the natural setting in which people engage in everyday life experiences. It aims to discover people's knowledge, values and understating of human existence (Given, 2008, p.584). "This means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena" that lie in the people's perspectives (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. 3). This style of research can also be referred to as phenomenology, which is a reflective study that explores the "lived experience" (Given, 2008, p. 614). As the present study focuses on the students' lived experiences within art, education and health, this research inquiry could be considered a phenomenological study (Given, 2008).

For this research inquiry a naturalistic approach was taken to explore the participants lived experience with artmaking and their perception of the impact of this experience on their wellbeing (O'Reilly & Kiyimba, 2015). To provide an in-depth exploration into the phenomenon occurring within a natural environment, a descriptive case study approach was utilised (Given, 2008). Case studies are used to provide deeper analysis into "one or a few instances of a phenomenon" (Given, 2008, p. 68). Also, as the research inquiry has been developed from the literature, and formed a descriptive theory on the research topic, a descriptive case study was used to explore and provide a detailed account of the participant's perceptions of the phenomenon (Mills, Durepos & Wiebe, 2010). This approach allowed for "in-depth interviews and discourse analysis" (Given, 2008, p.68) which uncovered the connections and relationships within the phenomenon (Mills, Durepos & Wiebe, 2010).

There are however some considerations when using these approaches. The small sample size of the case study required careful consideration of the environmental context of the phenomenon (Yin, 2003). Qualitative researchers study their subjects as they are in their natural setting. They have no intention of manipulating the environment or conducting experiments (Mills, Durepos & Wiebe, 2010), which is why all data is collected out in the field through methods such as interview or observations. The aim of using these methods is to maintain the natural context by keeping participants in their everyday settings to gain authentic data (Given, 2008). In keeping with this, the data for this study was collected in the school's art classroom. Time was also a factor considered, as the interview process was chosen to be conducted during the students' art period. Both location and time were chosen to ensure that the students' felt comfortable and acted in a natural manner. This helped to ensure authenticity and trustworthiness within the study data.

As this study is exploring a group of people in a social or cultural setting it is also an ethnographic study (Coghlan & Brydon-Miller, 2014). Researchers in ethnography seek to obtain holistic understanding (Coghlan & Brydon-Miller, 2014) of social and cultural groups “from the emic or insider’s perspective” (Given, 2008, p. 288). However, due to time restraints and limited resources, this study will use a micro-ethnography approach (Erickson & Mohatt, 1982). The aim of micro-ethnography is to microscopically analyse human activities and interactions in a social setting. In terms of an educational setting, this approach will seek to examine a school or class at a micro-level, instead of the entire school (Alvarez-Hevia, 2014). This will allow for a more focused and detailed observation of the human experience in the classroom.

This research incorporated aspects of micro-ethnography as it explored the classroom environment of two students at a local high school. Usually, ethnography-based studies would be granted a larger period for data collection (Alvarez-Hevia, 2014). Time restrictions meant that a complete ethnography approach was not possible. Thus, two students were selected from the class and asked to discuss their human experiences in their visual arts classroom, rather than an entire class. By using semi-structured interviews, the participants shared their stories, memories and emotions related to that social environment.

Finally, as the study aims to provide an in-depth examination into a phenomena, instead of focusing on producing a generalised theory (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014), it has an iterative (Durepos, Mills & Wiebe, 2010) and emergent nature (Given, 2008). This will allow for a reflective and quality analysis of the participant's perceptions. This process will aim to expand current knowledge of art in education. However, it is advised by Barnacle (2001) to be “mindful of the complex nature” of an individual’s lived experiences and to record the participant's experiences with “clarity and authenticity” (p, 3) to enhance trustworthiness.

## **Considerations for the Study**

### **Emergent and Iterative Design**

Emergent design refers to the evolving nature of research inquiries (Hatch, 2002). It is a flexible approach that can be applied to adjust the research design when new information arises that demands that the research design be changed. Given (2008) describes it as an “ongoing reassessment of how to conduct the research based on previous information and studies” (p.246). The research question, goals and particularly the data collection and analysis methods can be affected by emergent design (Given, 2008). The data collection and analysis

methods can also be influenced by the iterative design, which refers to “a systematic, repetitive and recursive process” used in “qualitative data analysis” (Durepos, Mills & Wiebe, 2010, p. 504). It involves a “systematic repetition of a sequence of tasks” conducted in the same manner to provide a deeper understanding of data and apply a standard of reliability (Durepos, Mills & Wiebe, 2010, p. 504).

In this research inquiry, emergent and iterative designs were utilised to provide the research with adaptability and reliability. The emergent design aided “generating theories and hypotheses” through the “flexible use of research methods” (Given, 2008, p.245). While the iterative approach provided a research process that is refined and reflective (Durepos, Mills & Wiebe, 2010, p.441).

### **Tacit Knowledge**

Tacit knowledge is a term that was introduced by philosopher Michael Polanyi, which refers to personal knowledge that is implicit and inexpressible (Coghlan & Miller, 2014). Michael Polanyi claimed that “all knowledge is either tacit or rooted in tacit knowledge” (Coghlan & Miller, 2014, p. 756). He claimed that “we inevitably know more than we can say” and labelled this intangible knowledge as tacit knowledge. Schwandt (2007) described Polanyi’s idea as “genuine knowledge one can have without being self-consciously aware of having it” (p.286). Coghlan and Miller’s (2014) state that tacit knowledge cannot be simply gained through extensive learning. However, it is gained through participatory experiences, “by being somewhere, doing something, engaged in extended practice” (p. 756). It is then made available for a specific situation/action but without realising that we have obtained this knowledge we are unable to verbalise it (Coghlan & Miller, 2014).

The aim of the research inquiry is to move tacit knowledge into explicit or propositional knowledge (Schwandt, 2007). Explicit knowledge refers to being “self-aware of the state of having knowledge” and propositional knowledge refers to written knowledge (Schwandt, 2007, p. 286). Through the qualitative research design, the use of semi-structured interviews (Given, 2008) and the tools of grounded theory (Charmaz, 2014) will help transfer the participants and researcher’s tacit knowledge into explicit and/or propositional knowledge.

### **Ethical Procedure**

Ethical procedures needed to be addressed before accessing any “natural settings for research purposes” (Given, 2008). Therefore, the Avondale Human Research Ethics

Committee (HREC) approved the research project before the data collection commenced. The research project was granted approval on 19<sup>th</sup> April 2018. A local school was then contacted for permission to have access to their facilities and students for the research project. Two students who volunteered to participate in the research were then provided with information outlining the research and consent forms. The students were made aware their involvement was not compulsory and could exit the research at any time, with no penalty to their relationship with their school. Both the student's identities would also remain confidential by using pseudonyms in the interview process.

### **Participants**

“Advancing the understanding of human behaviour depends heavily on the contributions of research participants”. Given, 2008, p. 598

For this research inquiry, two visual art students from a local high school volunteered to participate in exploring their experiences with art in the school environment. The school and students were both selected as a sample of convenience (Marshall, 1996) due to their accessibility and the fact that they were enrolled in visual arts at the school. The two participants were also of opposite sex. Having both genders involved in the study meant that both male and female views would be represented. Both students involved were provided with documented information on the research project and a consent form prior to the interviews. Parental consent was also obtained for underaged participants (Given, 2008).

### **Reflective Journal**

A reflective journal was utilised to provide an element of reflectivity (Mills, Durepos & Webe, 2010) to the research process. This method allowed the researcher, to engage in a continuous process of examination and explanation of thoughts and opinions (Mills, Durepos & Webe, 2010). It included field notes and observations from the interviews and also any changes to the research design and research question. Through documentation of subjective responses, it aimed to uncover any assumptions and biases, to create transparency (Ortlipp, 2008). This process also helped maintain the iterative element of the research process (Mills, Durepos & Wiebe, 2010) which contributed to the quality of the research project (Given, 2008).

### **Choice of Research Question**

Through a process of constant reflection (Brydon-Miller & Coghlan, 2014, p.225), the research question for this project was constantly revisited and reviewed as part of the iterative

design (Mills, Durepos & Wiebe, 2010, p. 504) that considered emerging themes during data collection. Table 1. provides a summary of the way that the research question was refined.

Table 1 – Reflection Journal: Question Development

Date	Question	Evaluation
12/03/2018	What effect does artmaking have on ten yr. 11 students at a local high school?	This question is too vague. It is a good starting point but is missing an element. What am will the artmaking impact?
20/04/2018	What relation does art making have with four yr 11 student’s perceptions of their wellbeing at a local high school?	Four students will be used to get a variety of responses but using a realistic number of students for the time frame.  Wellbeing was a concept that emerged from the literature and provided that missing element.
15/05/2018	What relation does art making in school have with two yr 12 student’s perceptions of their subjective wellbeing at a local high school?	Only two students from the local high school volunteered to participate in the study. These students were also from year 12.  I also added subjective wellbeing as it refers to the student’s perception of their wellbeing (quality of life).
	<i>What impact does artmaking in school have on two senior high school student’s subjective wellbeing?</i>	

### Semi-Structured Interviews

A semi-structured interview is a qualitative method used for data collection, that aims to provide flexibility to explore a topic (Given, 2008). This method uses a combination of predefined and open-ended questions (Wilson, 2013), which provides the researcher with control but also with opportunities to explore participants responses (Given, 2008).



Researchers who utilise a semi-structured interview approach generally develop an interview guide or structure. An interview guide usually contains an introduction outlining the purpose or topic of the interview, and a list of questions with prompts and closing comments (Wilson, 2013). The interviewer can follow their guides structure completely or deviate from the structure to explore topics based on participant responses (Given, 2008). By using this method, a researcher can “gather systematic information about” their topic, while maintaining an element of flexibility to allow exploration “when new issues or topics emerge” (Wilson, 2013, p. 24).

For small-scale research projects, the semi-structured interview method allows the researcher to focus on a smaller number of participants. This provides the researcher with opportunities to explore each participants response on a deeper level, to gain a greater understanding of the chosen topic. However, this interview process may uncover topics or content that is sensitive to the participants and may evoke an emotional response. The researcher, therefore, must be aware and prepared for these situations, when conducting the semi-structured interview process (Ashton, 2014). Table 2 below shows examples of questions that were asked in the interviews.

Table 2 –Example: Semi-structured Interview Questions

Example Question (From Interviews Stage 1)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tell me about your journey doing art at school?</li> <li>• How do you feel about doing art at school?</li> <li>• How do you feel about learning and making art with other students?</li> <li>• Do you prefer making art outside of school or inside the school?</li> <li>• Do you feel like you need direction from others (teacher) or make your own art decisions when creating an artwork?</li> <li>• In year 12, what medium and style do you use to create your own artworks? (pencil, paint, sculpture etc.) Why?</li> <li>• Do you feel limited by the medium you choose?</li> <li>• What is your favourite thing to paint?</li> </ul>

- What if you were asked to paint something you didn't agree with or didn't like. Would you still paint it?
- Do you see yourself as an artist?
- Do you think that your skill set lets you down?

### **Coding/Tools of Grounded Theory**

Once an interview had been conducted, the responses collected went through a coding process. This process occurs in the data analysis phase after each interview, where codes are generated to “systematize the ideas, concepts, and categories uncovered in the data” (Given, 2008, p. 85). When using a grounded theory approach (Charmaz, 2014) the coding process of data is more heavily emphasized to aid in developing a theory from the data. It divides coding into stages to provide a deeper understanding and “logic that underlies analysis” (Given, 2008, p. 86). The first stage is opening coding, which is an “initial interpretive process” that aims to identify common categories or themes within the data by using labels (Mills, Durepos & Wiebe, 2010, p. 156; Attride-Stirling, 2001). The second stage is axial coding, which begins refining the categories and their subcategories. It also explores the relationships between each category with the aim to identify the phenomenon. The final stage is selective coding, where the final categories are refined, and “core concepts are identified” (Mills, Durepos & Wiebe, 2010, p. 158). These various stages of coding aimed to identify the emerging themes and concepts in the data along with supporting evidence, this helped develop a theory through a descriptive account of the research topic.

### **Member Checking**

Member checking was implemented to provide validity to the research inquiry (Harper & Cole, 2012). This process involves presenting back the data collected to the participants for them to evaluate and confirm (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The participants were asked to ensure the researcher had accurately interpreted their experiences and the meaning of those experiences (Given, 2008). Member checking can play several different roles in data collection. In an interview it could be asking the participants to clarify their response or comment on an interview summary (Given, 2008). For this research inquiry, after each interview when the data had been coded, the results were presented back to the participants for them to confirm the interpretation and understanding of their response. Once the data was evaluated and confirmed, the next interview stage commenced.

## Trustworthiness

To ensure trustworthiness within the research project, Guba and Lincoln's (1985) quality criteria was implemented throughout the research process. The quality criteria include four elements that aid in ensuring authenticity. These elements include credibility, confirmability, dependability, and transferability (Shenton, 2004). Each of these elements was employed through a variety of strategies to aid in ensuring the overall rigour of the research project (Given, 2008). Table 3 below demonstrates the different elements of Guba and Lincoln's (1985) quality criteria and how they were addressed in this study.

Table 3 – Trustworthiness: Quality Criteria

Quality Criteria	Method Used
<p><b>Credibility</b> refers to creating a high level of consistency throughout the research project. It should be evident to the reader, why each research method was implemented. For example, why each of the participants was selected for the research project. The data analysis process also requires consistency between the respondent's expressions and the emerging themes. Given (2008) summarised credibility by describing it as implementing methodological methods and sources that promote "harmony between the participants' expressions and the researcher's interpretation" (p. 138).</p>	<p>Member checking was implemented to ensure the credibility of the data and researchers' interpretation. After each round of interviews, the participants were asked to participate in the member checking process. Each perceived theme or</p>
<p><b>Confirmability</b> is described by Given, (2008) as equal to "reliability and objectivity in quantitative research" (p. 112). Reliability and objectivity are both measures used to evaluate the truth and meaning within a study. Therefore, confirmability seeks to explore the reliability of the truth and meaning within the research project. This will ensure that participants expressions are analysed and interpreted appropriately and truthfully.</p>	<p>concept was also presented with direct quotes from the interview to represent how that theme emerged.</p>
<p><b>Dependability</b> recognises the evolving nature of the research process and context. As research context "cannot be completely understood a priori as a singular moment in time" (Given, 2008, p. 208). These issues can be accounted for through the appropriate methodologies. These methodologies</p>	<p>A reflective journal was used to help aid my evolving understanding of the research process and the findings. It helped to</p>

<p>should be utilised to track the evolving nature of the study. It must be evident how the results link to the data and how the findings accurately represent the participant's responses (Given, 2008). For this to occur, a research infrastructure must be implemented to support a repetition of the study to enable others to conduct.</p>	<p>make research choices transparent to the reader and the findings were accurately represented.</p>
<p><b>Transferability</b> is a process that refers to how the study's findings can be "transferred to other contexts and situations beyond the scope of the study context" (Given, 2008, p. 886). To ensure transferability, Given (2008) recommends researcher consider two key ideas. First, to select participants that are linked to the study's context. Secondly, to consider the "contextual boundaries" of the study's findings (p. 886). The aim is to adequately answer the research question and to provide a complete understating of the study's context.</p>	<p>A detailed description of the phenomenon will also be established to ensure the transferability of the study.</p>

## Chapter Summary

In summary, this study was designed to explore the impact of artmaking on the wellbeing of secondary students. To gain a better understanding and knowledge of this phenomena, the study was set in the Qualitative Paradigm and used a case study approach. This provided a descriptive account of the participants' experiences with artmaking in their everyday life. It also took on a Naturalistic approach, as the study aimed to discover the student's knowledge, values and understating of how artmaking has impacted on their wellbeing. This study also had used aspects of micro-ethnography as it explored students in a school environment. The interviews were conducted at school to ensure the participants felt comfortable and in their natural setting. Using semi-structured interviews also allowed the exploration of student's responses and allowed for deeper levels of inquiry into their knowledge and understanding of the topic. To further understand this phenomenon, a grounded theory coding process was used to explore links between artmaking and student wellbeing.

## CHAPTER 4: THE FINDINGS

### Introduction

This chapter will present the findings from the interviews process used to collect the data in the present study. Through the interviews, the students were able to discuss their artmaking journey and its impact on their wellbeing. When discussing their wellbeing they reported that they had both experienced negative relationships and suffered from mental disorders such as anxiety and depression. However, they found that artmaking had a positive impact on their wellbeing in multiple ways. They reported that art enabled them to find an escape from stress/anxiety/depression, discover positive relationships, experience a mix of emotions, find a drive to learn and a purpose/future. There were some differences between the students. Student A found that art provided her with a connection to nature and comfort, while Student B said that art provided him with a sense of belonging, identity, and connected him to his religion and gave him a vehicle form which he could communicate. Before discussing these findings in more detail, the following section introduces you to Student A and Student B.

### Who Is Student A?

Student A lives in New South Wales, Australia where she is surrounded by the Australian bush and wildlife. She is currently attending her local independent high school, where she is a senior student working towards her HSC. At school, she is able to explore her passions for cooking, music and art. However, she has had a difficult journey to get where she is today. Earlier in her childhood, she developed anxiety and depression, which resulted in her partaking in a variety of therapies and medications but not all the therapies were helpful. She was involved in a family-based treatment for eating disorders, which required her to have routine checks, and her family participated by watching her every move. She was involved in the therapy for over a year and described it as being traumatic and one of the biggest negative experiences in her life. The medication she took stopped her problems from getting worse but did not fix her problems. She was however able to find refuge through another form of therapy and her passion for art.

Student A has been doing art for as long as she can remember. She discovered a love for drawing at a young age and practised it regularly throughout her childhood. Art was not a subject available to her in primary school and she had to wait until high school to really

immerse herself in art. Her artmaking was purely self-taught until year eight, when she had her first art lesson. She felt excited to finally have an art lesson and a teacher who could widen her knowledge of art. She loved learning more about art and exploring some different areas that she was unable to do by herself outside of school. She was also happy to have a teacher who she could ask for guidance and who encouraged her to pursue her passion.

Through her art journey, she discovered that art could help with her wellbeing. During her last attempt at therapy, her involvement in art was recognised and used as a useful management technique. In November 2016 Student A was hospitalised and then introduced to Dialectical Behaviour Therapy (DBT). This therapy was used to help treat her eating disorder and her major depressive disorder which emerged from the eating disorder. It involved one-on-one sessions with a caseworker who focused on her wellbeing and taught her how to manage her disorder through a variety of mindfulness techniques. Unfortunately, she stopped DBT late last year (2017) when her caseworker moved away. However, she feels capable of managing her disorders by still using the mindfulness techniques that were integrated with her lifelong passion for art.

### **Who Is Student B?**

Student B also lives in New South Wales, Australia and attended the same local independent high school as Student A. During his life he also encountered some negative experiences that impacted on his wellbeing. While at school he was bullied by other students, which contributed to his anxiety and depression and affected his interactions with other people and students. Student B didn't have a strong sense of belonging or identity and struggled to fit in. However, his school experience was not all negative, he discovered a sense of spirituality. The school exposed him to religion and he was able to explore the idea of God. His family were not religious and never really discussed the concept of religion with him. Being at a religious school he discovered a connection to God and slowly built a sense of belonging through his local church.

Even though his family does not share the same sense of spirituality, he does hold his family in high regard. He believes his family are a crucial element in his life and have been a major support throughout his childhood. His family were the ones who encouraged him to explore his passion for art. They helped him to explore art both in school and outside of school. Through his multiple different art classes, his skills and knowledge of art improved. These art classes also gave him a comfortable art space to immerse himself in his artmaking,

as he didn't have an art space available at home. He loves having a clear open space with all his equipment available, so he can engage in his own artist practice. One thing he was very thankful for, was having great art teachers who encouraged him and guided him to explore artmaking.

Through exploring his own artist practice, he was able to discover things about his identity and purpose. Now he is exploring careers where he can harness his passion for art, however, he is concerned about the place of art in society. He feels that society can sometimes affect art and restrict it. Recently Newcastle University changed their fine arts degree and offers what they call the creative industries. Although attracted to studying art at the university he is worried that this change will involve less art and consequently he is unsure about his future plans.

### **Art and Wellbeing**

Through the interview process the students were asked about their wellbeing and artmaking journey, and if they believed their artmaking has had any effect on their wellbeing and their quality of life. The students were able to identify several factors that have influenced their wellbeing. Some of these factors were common among the students. These include:

### **Addressing Anxiety and Depression Through Art**

Unfortunately, both the students in this study have experienced anxiety and depression in childhood and throughout high school. Student B was able to overcome these mental disorders in his senior years at the school, however, Student A still struggles with these conditions and finds it can be a constant battle throughout her day. During the interviews, aspects of their anxiety and depression displayed themselves through their actions. This was discussed in the reflective journal:

#### **Reflective Journal Entry**

“Now that the second round of interview is complete I have reflected back on both the first and second interviews. One topic that keeps repeating is anxiety and depression. When the students talk about their experiences with these mental states they can be reluctant to discuss it or are very vague. This could be because these issues are difficult to discuss because they have caused a lasting affect that impacts them today. I have also noticed Student A in particular can close or tense her body and tends to show more signs of social anxiety than Student B. During the interviews he has displayed a more relaxed posture and

is completely happy to share his story but does focus more on the positives and avoids the negative. Therefore, I believe these students have experienced serious mental issues and are still battling them today.” 14/6/18

During the interviews, Student A kept referring to her anxiety and depression as negative headspaces. She described these headspaces as either anxiety headspaces where she felt panicked and worried, or depression headspaces which makes her feel destructive and upset. When asked what triggers her anxiety and depression Student A responded by saying she wasn't one hundred percent sure and had been trying to figure out what was her trigger. Sometimes she finds she can be anxious for seemingly no reason. Student A, however, did identify that social conflicts, arguments, or general social situations can trigger her anxiety and/or depression. However, you may never know if student A is in one of her negative headspaces as she tends to keep it to herself. To aid in managing her anxiety and depression student A uses a variety of methods. She discussed how sleep and breathing exercises can help reduce her negative headspaces. She also uses an observation technique she discovered through therapy and combines it with art to combat the variety of disorders she was struggling with.

“Sometimes when you feel anxious there's too much going on and your brain's spinning and your thoughts are all over the place” (Student B, Interview 13.06.18)

Student B discussed that he struggled with anxiety and depression during his days in high school. He believes that his anxiety and depression came on around high school because there were a lot of changes with his environment and the people around him. At school, he was bullied and isolated, which resulted in the development of his anxiety. During this time period he remembers feeling overwhelmed and powerless. He began to overthink and second guess everything, which created unnecessary stress. This anxiety affected his ability to integrate with others. A couple of years back when he was struggling with his anxiety and depression, he felt that he hit rock-bottom. He felt that his anxiety was debilitating him, and his depression affected who he was as a person. He began to feel a real need for control over his life. He was able to find that control and move past these mental disorders, though at times he still has to take stock and check himself for early indicators of anxiety and/or depression.



As we know, both students experienced anxiety and depression, and one even still struggles with them today. However, both students were able to find a way to help manage and reduce these mental disorders through art. Past studies, that explored the concept of art impacting wellbeing, indicate that art has an ability to help people improve their emotions, health and overall wellbeing (Ross, Hollen & Fitzgerald, 2006; Sandmire et al., 2015). Both the students in this study discovered a similar effect on their anxiety and depression. When feeling anxious or depressed the students will use art to help bring them into a positive space and either distract them from their negative thoughts or help release them.

Student A found a way to help her disorders through art and the comfort it provides. She uses art to relax and to manage her stress. When using it to relax she does it for fun or to explore a new idea. When using it to manage her stress art will be used as a distraction from her negative headspaces. For instance, when she is feeling anxious she seeks to do something productive to boost her mood and uses art as that productive activity to counteract her anxiety. In class, if she feels anxious or stressed she will begin to doodle on the edges of her paper. Usually, when combating her anxiety, her drawings will be more detailed, as they require more focus and attention and, in this way, they take her mind off the negativity and onto something that is productive that gives her a sense of achievement. Using art as a distraction doesn't make her feel instantly better, but does help bring her back to a neutral emotional state.

When she participated in the Dialectical Behaviour Therapy (DBT) her caseworker taught her exercises to help distract her in stressful situations. These exercises were focused on mindfulness and required her to place her focus on something positive instead of negative. Two of the exercises she mentioned that helped with her stress were breathing and observation exercises. During DBT her caseworker discovered she had a flow zone, which they integrated with the observation technique. In particular, art enabled her to engage to a point where she experienced flow. This enabled her art to be a great distraction as she is able to place all her focus and observational skills on her artmaking and cancel out her surroundings. Art has now become her favourite distraction and has become a habit and an instinctive response to distracting herself from negativity.

Student B also found that art was a great escape from negativity. He discussed how he could use art as an escape from reality and negative situation. In particular, when he felt anxious or depressed, he would use art as an immediate response to help control or release

the negativity. Sometimes he would even use art before anxiety or depression issues occurred. Student B found that art was also a great way to meditate and reflect on his negative emotions. He could learn about his emotional tendencies and individual stresses by exploring them through visuals. This process was also quite calming for him and he felt it helped release a lot of tension. His art became a way to release his emotions and relax by channelling the positive emotions brought on by art.

#### Reflective Journal Entry

“One thing I noticed in yesterday’s interview with Student A, was that she appeared to brighten up when talking about her art. She appeared to relax more and become more engaged as showed me her art and discussed each of them. However, one thing she said did surprise me. She mentioned that her artworks don’t tend to focus on expressing emotion or messages. I found this quite odd as when looking through her artworks there appeared to be a dark underling theme. These emotions were quite clear to me but because of her perspective she is unaware of them.” 7/5/18

### **Relationships Through Art**

Martin Seligman (2011) reported that healthy relationships make a key contribution to our wellbeing and can enhance our levels of happiness. During the interviews, both students identified that they had experienced negative relationships that had impacted their wellbeing. These relationships contributed to their anxiety and depression and initiated the development of anxiety for one of the students. Both students proclaimed that they had been subjected to bullying in school and one struggled with family relationships.

Student A reported having a variety of negative relationships that have contributed to her overall wellbeing. She described her relationship with her family as being distant and believes that they are not great role models. However, she did state that they have provided her with a stable family surrounding and gave her a privileged upbringing. There was one family member who had a large negative effect on her and verbally and physically abused her, by calling her names and using food as a punishment when she was only 11. Unfortunately, she didn’t experience many positive relationships at school either. In her earlier years of school, Student A said that she didn’t have any friends and would often spend her time alone. During year 5 she was bullied by other female students and this continued until around year 8 when the bullying reduced and eventually stopped. During this period, she

found herself alone and without any friends. Being consciously alone, she began to feel anxious when having to interact with others. Unfortunately, during high school she also had a boyfriend, who she described as abusive. These things were very disappointing to hear and were discussed further in my journal.

#### Reflective Journal Entry

“It was very disturbing to hear about the amount of relationship problems Student A has experienced. To hear that she had family troubles and friendships troubles was very concerning. This meant she would have grown up feeling she had little to no social support. This was very confronting for me as my family unit was a major support team when I had negative social interactions at school. This made me curious to gain Student A’s opinion on Maslow’s hierarchy and if she views her art as a pathway into positive relationships.” 17/6/18

Student B also experienced negative relationships throughout his childhood. However, unlike student A, he has a positive family surrounding. Student B’s negative relationships were more to do with friendships. In school, he did not have many friends and experienced some negative interaction even with those friends. He was also bullied throughout high school by other students, which had an effect on his mental state throughout his entire schooling as he struggled to fit in. He believes that as a young child he didn’t receive much guidance on self-worth or friendships and that may have contributed to the negative experiences he encountered with other people.

As previously discussed, relationships can play a key part in our lives and our wellbeing (Seligman, 2011). However, mental health disorders like anxiety and depression can impact the quality of relationships we have with other people. Both of the students encountered some negative relationships in their past, but through art were able to meet like-minded people and form positive relationships. Throughout Student A’s art journey, she was able to share and create art with a multitude of other people. She enjoys being in class with other art students and being able to see their different creative ideas. She also feels inspired by her enthusiastic art teachers who encourage her to be creative and to experiment with her artmaking. Sometimes after finishing an artwork at school or at home, she will give it away as a present, which she believes that people appreciate and enjoy.

Even though she originally started her relationship with her family isn't close, when asked who she shows her artworks to her she responded with, "my mum" (Student A, Interview 06.05.18). Her mum sometimes displays them in their home and even takes pictures to show her work colleges and friends. This makes her feel that her art is appreciated but she also feels that her mum goes overboard. However, if an artwork doesn't work out she will only show one person who is her best friend. Often, after showing her mum, she tucks her artworks away or puts them up on social media. She uses an Instagram account to upload her artwork for the public to see. Through this process, she was able to make connections with like-minded artists who also use Instagram to showcase their artworks. She also gains a lot of positive feedback from others who see her work on social media.

During the interviews Student B stated that he has a great family environment and believes it is an important factor in his life. His family were the ones to encourage him to explore his interest in art and helped him feel supported throughout his art experience. He often feels joy when his family show appreciation for his artworks. Another group of people who have supported him throughout his art journey have been his art teachers. They have also encouraged him to explore his passion for art and have encouraged him to challenge himself. He believes they have all helped to provide him with direction and provide him with mentor figures. Being in an art class has also enabled him to share his passion with other students and bond with other creative minds.

### **Emotions and Art**

Throughout the interviews both students identified a wide variety of positive and negative emotions they have experienced when immersed in their artmaking. Through past studies we know that art can affect a person emotionally and can help increase people's positive emotions (Reynolds, 2010; Walsh, Martin & Schmidt, 2004). Positive emotion is also the first element in Martin Seligman's (2011) PERMA model. The students in this study concluded that art did help them enhance their positive emotions and learnt that they could use art to bring them into a positive headspace.

Student A identified that through art she experienced a range of positive emotions that made her feel happy, enthusiastic, determined, proud, accomplished, appreciated and passionate. Often, she can feel enthusiastic about her art and when she is about to work on an artwork, she will feel a sense of anticipation and excitement. She also has a strong sense of determination and can develop a drive to create and express her ideas. Painting or drawing

works that involve great detail or realism makes her feel happy and proud of what she has achieved. She doesn't particularly feel the same emotions when trying other styles, but when engaged in the drawing she can feel a deep sense of passion. After she has created an artwork sometimes she will give it away as a present, sell it or keep it in her personal collection. When people see or received this artwork they feel a sense of happiness which makes Student A feel that she and her artworks are appreciated.

Student B also experienced similar positive emotions. He identified that he could feel happy, enthusiastic, accomplished, appreciated, satisfied, assured, encouraged, relieved, courageous and loved. Like Student A, he finds joy in art and gets excited and is enthusiastic to be involved in artmaking. He found that doing art provides him with a sense of comfort and relief. It also makes him feel assured in who he is and provides him with courage and meaning. He believes it also gives him a large sense of satisfaction and a sense of achievement, especially after completing an artwork he is proud of and which the audience understands.

Even though art has provided both students with positive emotions and experiences, it has also been accompanied by some negative ones. David Bayles and Ted Orland (2001) recognise that art does also provoke negative emotions. Student A identified that during artmaking she can feel upset, annoyed, embarrassed and fearful. If she doesn't get a great result she can experience an upset feeling like she, or her skills, have let herself down. If her artmaking ends with a bad result she usually gets embarrassed and self-conscious, which makes her hide it away. She also has a fear of making mistakes, wasting supplies or even time. She loves the idea of painting because if she makes a mistake she can just paint over it. However, she claims that the negative emotions are only a small part of artmaking and generally she experiences positive emotions during the artmaking process.

In a similar way Student B has also experienced some negative emotions through his art journey. He identified emotions like disappointment, stress, feeling jittery and unsure, judged and hurt. When participating in the artmaking process sometimes he can find it stressful and he can be unsure about an artwork. Sometimes he feels that he lets himself down and gets disappointed with the result of the artwork. Furthermore, he also can fear the judgment of others and hurt by what they might say about him or his artwork.

Many artists can feel self-conscious, fear making mistakes and fear the judgment of others, which can result in artists ending their art journey (Bayles & Orland, 2001). Both of

these students have experienced these emotions, however, they believe there is so much more positive emotion in art, that they wish to continue art throughout their life time.

#### Reflective Journal Entry

“In the interviews I implemented a small activity to help understand the students level of wellbeing. This activity had a list of positive and negative emotions, the students were asked to circle any emotions they have experienced during their artmaking. One interesting thing was Student A response to the activity. She identified a variety of emotions in the emotion activity where she was asked to circle any emotions she has felt during her artmaking. Even though she circled a few negative emotions, she claims that her artmaking experiences are always more positive than negative. This interests to me as a teacher as many of students seem to get discouraged from these negative emotions in art, yet these two students don’t seem affected.” 6/4/18

### **Personal Development in Art**

Daniel Pink (2011) explores the concept of motivation and what our main motivators are. He believes there are three internal motivators which are, autonomy, purpose and mastery (Pink, p. 222). Autonomy refers to self-direction and control over our own work and choices. Pink found that people’s work improved when they were given more self-direction and choice. Having a sense of purpose was also found that have a major impact on people’s motivation, as we often want to contribute and be a part of something greater than ourselves. He also found that we seek mastery, to become better at something that holds meaning. When people see their progress in an activity or skill, it can provide them with a large sense of accomplishment which impacts their wellbeing (Seligman, 2011).

Having a sense of autonomy, mastery, accomplishment and purpose makes people want to learn more and keep improving their passions. For the students in this study their passion for artmaking developed a drive in them to learn and improve their skills. They wanted to enhance their artmaking abilities to produce better results. One student even wanted to expand their knowledge, so they could explore other areas of art and widen their artistic practice. After improving their skills or creating a high-quality artwork they would gain a large sense of achievement.

For student A, after finally being in a class that explored her area of passion, she was excited to learn and improve her skills. She discovered a determination to learn and improve her artmaking skills to make her artworks the best they could be. Her sense of determination to improve saw her set goals for herself and a very high standard for her art. Therefore, in class, she tried her hardest and even when her art teachers gave her a task she is unsure of, or thought was hard, she will still attempt it. She believes that art can give you a sense of achievement by either making something you're proud of, or even just by completing the task. She knows that after completing an artwork she can feel pleased and triumphant, and sometimes disappointed, depending on the finished result. But either way, she always feels a sense of completion and knowing that she can now start a new one.

“I think that's why art's really good for me because I have a sense of accomplishment”

(Student A, Interview 06.05.18)

Student B also has the drive to improve his art skills and knowledge. He attended art classes outside of school that focused on more sophisticated techniques and experimentation, as he believed that school was focused around the basics and core art skills. However, the school did open him up to the cultural and historical context of art, which helped form his own artistic practice. School taught him the importance of reflection and involved him in a continuous evaluation process of his artistic abilities to help refine his practice. This gives him a good understanding of his capabilities and skills and alerts him to when he needs to improve a certain skill. In contrast to Student A, Student B is more comfortable with experimentation and pushing into different areas of art. He has explored artworks using all different mediums and gains a great sense of accomplishment after learning something new and creating an artwork that he is proud of and that holds meaning for him.

#### Reflective Journal Entry

“When coding the interview there were re-occurring words like determination and learning. I originally thought that accomplishment was something felt after achieving an artwork, but the students were able to link a sense of accomplishment to the re-occurring words determination and learning. I never really thought of feeling accomplishment after learning a new skill. I guess I have never stopped to reflect on my own art practice and consider that you can feel sense of achieve all throughout the process.” 5/8/18

In Geelong Grammar's wellbeing program one aspect of their wellbeing model is purpose (Norrish, 2015). They wish to help their students achieve a high quality of life and believe they can achieve this by using Seligman's PERMA model, which encourages students to find meaning in your life. For both students in the study, they reported having a low sense of meaning and direction in their lives and were able to discover a sense of purpose through their artmaking.

Originally Student A didn't have a plan for the future, but after she developed her passion for art she became driven to pursue her future. She believes it is a big part of her life now and wants it to continue. She has even started selling her artworks and making commissions to generate a small income. Currently, she uses an Instagram account to share her artworks to the public and also promote her name as an artist. This helps her gain and manage commissions from customers. She has also looked into other ways of maintaining art in her life now and in the future. In school, she explored a range of art careers and thought about exploring a career in graphic design or art therapy. However, she understands that art careers can be difficult to obtain and maintain. Therefore, she is considering working in hospitality, while continuing art as a hobby. Because art careers can be difficult she is a little unsure about the future but knows art has to be a part of it.

Student B loves the idea of exploring art as a possible career choice. He would love to generate an income from his passion and make meaningful commissions for others. However, he struggled with what direction he was going to take and believed he didn't receive much guidance on what to do with his life. Art classes at school didn't discuss what career choices were out there. Therefore, he did some independent research and has explored career paths such as; curating, freelance artist, teacher, art therapist and graphic design. He knows that careers in the art can be hard to obtain and doesn't wish to cause himself unnecessary stress by worrying over an art career. He believes he will always keep art throughout his life, if not as a career, as a lifetime hobby. It was interesting that both students had the same responses when asked about their future and was discussed deeper in the reflective journal.



### Reflective Journal Entry

“When coding the interviews, I noticed that in the first interview the student expressed great interest in having an art career, which Student A has already begun by producing commissions. However, in the last interview they claimed that they were not so concerned if they did not obtain an art career. This was quite interesting as they seemed so enthused about having a career in art but then back down after further discussion. From personal experience I understand it can be hard to become a successful artist and I believe that the students also understand the difficulty of having a career as an artist, and that is why they discussed not wanting to worry about getting a career in art. to avoid stress.”

16/8/18

Student B not only wants to immerse himself in an art future because it's enjoyable but also because he believes it is a gift from God and would like to ensure his skills are utilised to the best of his ability. Art has given him a purpose and helps him to find meaning in his life. Art enables him to contribute to something greater than himself and create meaning in other people's lives.

### **Findings Unique to Each Student**

Above were findings that are common between the two students, but the students also report different factors that individually impacted them. Discussed below are the art factors that were unique to each of the students.

### **Discovering Their Identity**

A person's sense of self and their identity contribute to their wellbeing (Sharma, S. & Sharma, M., 2018). Student B struggled with his identity throughout high school and was unsure about who he was and what was his purpose in life. Art was able to help in his discovery of his identity. Through his artmaking, he was able to explore concepts that had meaning to him by using himself as a subject matter. He was able to develop and grow his character through his creative expression. Art also enabled him to learn about himself and gain understanding about his own unique character. He found that art was able to connect him with himself and enable him to experience self-actualization. He was able to realise and experience a sense of fulfilment in who he is and what his purpose in life could be. It was interesting that art was able to play a role of discovery, but it also was used to communicate his identity which was discussed in the reflective journal.

### Reflective Journal Entry

“To be honest I am not sure about what Student B meant by identity, this is a concept I personally have not reflected upon. I guess my identity is a part of my tacit knowledge and is hard to explain. It appears that for Student B his identity has been a constant reflection though his life and particularly in later high school. I am curious if Student B also found that his identity was a part of his tacit knowledge and if his artmaking was away to communicate to others about his own identity. For me it would be hard to visually represent oneself, but I believe for Student B his artworks may have acted like a story showing his development and journey. For example, his self-portraits of his anxiety may have acted as a visual representation of the pain and emotions he felt he could only affectively communicate through the use of visuals and shows his journey through that period in his life.” 23/5/18

Later in the interviews Student B reported that his art did also help him to express his identity to others. Using his artworks, he could represent himself and express his identity through visuals to his audience. Student B said he was never truly good with words and finds that art is his best form of language. As art uses visuals to communicate he finds it easier to express his emotions and idea. Through his artworks, he has been able to communicate who he is and his life journey. During mid to late high school, he created a series of artworks that represented his anxiety. To do this he drew a self-portrait which was distorted and twisted and painted in a variety of dull and contrasting colours. He then turned it into a ceramic sculpture which used similar distorted features and broken eyes. Through this artwork, he was able to express the pain he felt and what it’s like to be struggling with anxiety.

“it’s just that art’s probably my best...yeah...the language” (Student B, Interview 13.06.18)

Student B thinks it’s important to express your true self and heart through your artmaking and to communicate wholistic and truthful messages. He also thinks it is important to ensure the messages are communicated properly to the intended audience as he wants his artworks to be useful to others. His artworks, however, not only helped him communicate his messages, they also became a part of him. Being an artist became a part of his identity and all his artworks became an extension of himself. So, he used art to help form his identity and then as an artist to communicate this identity to others.

## **Art Environments**

The environments we live in can have a large impact on our wellbeing. Student A and Student B had contrasting views on the environments they desired for their artmaking practice. Student B wanted a place that gave a sense of community, while Student A wanted a comfortable and familiar space for relaxation. As we know, Student B had negative experiences at school which impacted his mental health. It also impacted his sense of belonging. Having a sense of belonging and connectedness to others is important and has a positive effect on students learning and mental health (KidsMatter, 2018). Throughout the interviews Student B discussed the concept of belonging and how he went on a journey to discover it. Due to the lack of this sense of belonging in his past, he appears to be continuously searching for positive community environments. His passion for art was able to help him find communities where he could discover a sense of belonging. It also allowed him to communicate with others through his own visual language. He often uses his art to try and promote belonging and community, by drawing people together. He wants the audience to find meaning and connect with each other.

“Also, I found there’s a universal feeling of belonging in your art when you find people with similar feelings.” (Student B, Interview 13.06.18)

Being in an art class also allowed him to meet other artistic people who shared his passion. Together with other art students he was able to appreciate art and sharing their ideas. When sharing his abilities and artworks with others he feels ecstatic. He has an urge to help others and wants to share his art skills and knowledge. It makes him happy when other seek his help with their own artmaking. He believes people can detach themselves from art when they can’t share with other artists. He believes that art can help our understanding of each other and that’s why he loves the idea of having social art groups or spaces in schools and in the wider community.

In contrast to Student B, Student A appears to gravitate towards environments that provide her with a sense of comfort. As she has experienced negative social interaction in the past she prefers areas of solitude or spaces that don’t demand a high amount of social interaction. This can also be seen in her artistic practice as she prefers areas that are familiar and comfortable. During school, she discovered a love for realism and being able to draw her subject matter in realistic detail. To create her realistic artworks, she will mostly use pencils or graphite but has also branched out into watercolours and acrylic paint. During school, she discovers surrealism which distorts the real and experimented with a surrealism styled

artwork of an apple which was cracked like an egg with yolk spilling out. She believes that without art classes that encouraged experimentation and helped guide students, she would not have been able to try new styles. However, even with exposure to so many different art styles she keeps coming back to realism.

Her subject matter also provided a sense of familiarity and comfort. At the beginning of her art journey, she really enjoyed drawing animals. She especially loved drawing horses and was stuck in a period where she only drew horses. Another subject matter she regularly explores was eyes and became strict about her capability to draw them realistically. In high school, she experimented with drawing the human form but struggled with drawing hands. She liked experimenting and trying new things but always came back to her familiar subject matter. These subject matters were something she could easily draw on the spot and get into whenever she needed to.

#### Reflective Journal Entry

“One thing I noticed when comparing the students answers about the environments they seek for their artmaking, was that they seek completely different environment. Student A reported being introverted, disliking attention on her and having quite spaces inside to focus on her art. While Student B kept mentions community and having social spaces where he can share his art and skills. This was very interests as they both had the same negativity social interactions in the past. This makes me curious to why the student craves these different spaces. One reasons why Student B is craving community art spaces is because of his lack of belonging in the past and now desires a sense of belonging and therefore want social spaces. For Student A it could be the opposite, as her past negativity relationships have caused her to avoid them now because she still fears negativity social interaction, and this is why she desires to be alone with her artmaking. These two different outcomes are very interesting, and I wonder what occurred in their past to cause this.”

16/8/18

#### **Art as a Lens to Other Aspects of Life**

Art was able to help the students connect with other aspects of their life, such as spirituality and nature. Walsh (2011) and Koenig (2009) claim that spirituality has a positive effect on a person’s lifestyle and health. It can help build positive relationships and improve mental health (Walsh, 2011). In the interviews, Student B discussed that religion was a factor

that helped improve his wellbeing and found that it did help build positive relationships and improve mental health. Student B originally did not have a strong sense of spirituality and did not have a strong religious family background. He developed a deep sense of spirituality during high school. As his family is not religious and did not discuss religion with him, he could only explore the idea of religion at school. Through school, he gradually developed his idea of what God means to him. In his senior years he began to feel pretty confirmed in what he believed and was baptized into his local church. As religion became a growing element in his life he began to incorporate religious themes into his art, which helped him to explore and expand his beliefs.

“It helps me connect with a sense of the Creator, and it helps me understand” (Student B, Interview 13.06.18)

He believes that God blessed him with a talent and he wants to use that talent to glorify God in his own way. In his art, he explored ways to express God and his life principles. He discovered that art provided ways to connect with God and deepen he understand of him. It also helped him to reflect on his own identity and the world God created. His understanding of the world grew, and he began to see the connections and designs that make up this world. In this way his artmaking enabled him to connect with his surroundings and God.

Roger Walsh (2011) also believes that spending time in nature can improve your wellbeing, as it can improve your cognitive function and aid in relaxation. What is interesting is that Student A tends to draw subject matter that stems from a nature theme. All her drawing and artworks appear to reference nature, which could be due to where she lives. Her home is surrounded by the Australian bush and state forests and feels that nature and wildlife have a big influence on her art. When she goes for walks with her dogs, she will often discover new inspiration. Sometimes she will gather inspiration from interesting colours or textures in nature. When she was younger she was heavily influenced by horses, and this led to her being stuck in a period where she only drew horses. The became such a habit she would draw them all over her school work. When she was in year six, she branched away from her normal subject matter and experimented with fantasy creates and dragons. Now in her senior years at school, she has taken inspiration from birds in her environment and begun manipulating them and turning them into her own mythical creatures.

Although she loves nature and is influenced by many things in her environment, she never draws outside. She prefers making art inside which is more comfortable for her. It would seem that Student A's wellbeing has been impacted by her time in nature, and the artworks she has created. Two of the studies discussed in chapter 2, found that artworks on nature had a considerable effect on patients in hospitals, and in a similar way Student A's nature inspired artworks seem to contribute to her wellbeing.

#### Reflective Journal Entry

“Student A has a very interesting approach to her artmaking. Her artmaking is very much an activity to help reduce negativity by drawing her focus onto something else. To help her focus she has picked detailed subject matter to draw and engage her mind. When she discussed her subject matter, she expressed that it was more about the detail and having an accurate representation than the message. This is the opposite for Student B. This was interesting as all her subject matter appears to have a common theme of nature. She reported that nature and her environment provide inspiration for her artworks. As an observer when looking at her artworks they appeared to either perfectly represent the subject matter, have a sense of beauty and a sense of mythical creation. Some of her animals were realistic and some were altered with a mythical creature design. For someone who does not believe her artworks do not contain emotion or messages her artworks demonstrate a love for beauty, creation and nature. I think that Student A's artworks are actually similar to Student B, as they are a tool for connecting herself to her environment and communicating her perspective of the world” 9/9/18.

### Chapter Summary

In summary, this chapter explored how artmaking influenced the students' wellbeing in a variety of different ways. Through examining the student's responses, this chapter was able to explore recurring elements of art that appear to have an effect on wellbeing across different settings. For the students, art was able to provide the students with an escape from stress/anxiety/depression, a chance to develop positive relationships, to experience a mix of emotions, to find the drive to learn and a purpose/future. It also gave them a connectedness to nature/religion, a sense of belong and identity, sense of comfort and acted as a form of communication. But how do these different factors associated with artmaking influence their wellbeing and what does this mean for artmaking in schools? The next chapter will discuss these results and recommendation for schools.

## CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

### **Art Factors**

During the interviews, the students discussed both non-art and art factors that have impacted their wellbeing. The students had problems with relationships and with mental health. Even though both students had experienced similar influences in their lives, they reported quite different levels of wellbeing. Student A believes that her wellbeing is a level five, on a scale of one to ten, as she believes she has neutral levels of wellbeing. Student B experiences high levels of wellbeing and reports he is flourishing in his life. This is interesting as although they have had similar experiences in their lives, the differences in their lives have led to different outcomes. Overall, Artmaking helped both students to experience positive emotions, good relationships, high levels of engagement, accomplishment, meaning, helped them escape from the negative, spend time in nature and gave them mixed emotional outcomes.

### **Positive Emotion**

Art making helped provide both students with positive emotions. They identified feeling happy, enthusiastic, determined, proud, appreciated, accomplishment, satisfied, relieved, courage, love and passion. These findings correlate with Reynolds (2010) study that uncovered his participants experienced an enhancement of positive emotions through their artmaking. Walsh, Martin and Schmidt (2004) also found that their participants had an increase in positive emotions when participating in artmaking activities. From Seligman (2011) we know that experiencing positive emotions is key to achieving high levels of happiness and they can even help people experience high levels of health such as reducing the chances of developing colds. Both students in this study appear to recognised that involvement in art enables them to experience positive emotions, and this strengthens their sense of wellbeing. This notion of art providing positive emotions links strongly to the next two themes.

### **Engagement and Flow**

The second element of Seligman's PERMA model is engagement, which refers to engaging in a meaningful activity that provides you with a sense of enjoyment and flow (Seligman, 2011). Wilms (2014) in discussing the connection between engagement and wellbeing and found that engagement in an activity can result in higher levels of wellbeing

and better academic performance for students. During the interviews the students discussed feeling a positive sense of engagement when participating in artmaking. Reynolds (2010) found that female participants reported having an enriched mental life and finding connection through engaging in artmaking. In a similar way it was Student A who discussed engaging in artmaking to the point where she feels a sense of flow. Csikszentmihalyi (1997) refers to flow as fully engaging in a meaningful activity that challenges a person's skills. Student A found during her DBT therapy, artmaking was an activity that allowed her to fully engage her time and efforts in a meaningful way.

### **Escape and Management Tool**

Both the students use art as an escape and management tool for negativity. As, the students have/had anxiety, depression and negative situations, they seek something positive to counteract this negativity in their lives. By using artmaking, they can manage and reduce these negative elements and move them into a positive space. Selk (2016) discussed the idea that art can be an escape and enable an individual to escape from every day and anxiety. It can also help restore mental health by providing "balance and perspective" (Selk, 2016, p. 79). Past studies also had similar results. Ross, Hollen & Fitzgerald (2006) found that artmaking improved their participant's levels of depression. While Sandmire, Rankin, Gorham, Eggleston, French, Lodge, and Grimm (2015) found that artmaking activities also improved the anxiety of college students around the exam period. These results correspond with Walsh's theory of having activities that can be used as a self-management tool to help reduce stress and to relax (Walsh, 2011). Therefore, from this study we could conclude that artmaking, which provides positive emotions, can be used as a valuable resource for managing mental illnesses like anxiety and depression.

### **Relationships – Belonging, Social Support, School Connectedness**

Anxiety and depression can have a major impact on a person's relationships (Beyondblue, 2018, p. 13). This was one concern both the students discussed extensively throughout the interviews. The students talked about experiencing issues with other students and struggling to find a sense of belonging in the school environment and even at home. However, through their artmaking, they were able to connect with others through sharing their art and skills. Student A was able to feel a sense of appreciation through sharing her art with friends and family, and also discovered liked minded artists in her art class and through social media. Student B was able to connect with others through sharing his art and by



sharing his skills with other art students. This also helped him feel a sense of belonging by being in an art community, which shared his passion.

Another contributing factor for Student B was religion, Involvement in his church enable him to gain connections and build a sense of belonging. Religion was also a subject matter he was beginning to explore at a deeper level in his artmaking and he was beginning to share his faith and religious ideas with others. Walsh (2011) discusses how involvement in religion can help improve mental health. Eisen, Ulrich, Shepley, Varni and Sherman (2008) also found that social support had the biggest influence on the participant's wellbeing. Through art, he was able to connect with others and explore other aspects of his life that provide positive relationships. These findings are also seen in Reynolds (2010) study where his participants experienced enhanced levels of social connections through their artmaking.

### **Accomplishment**

Artmaking is one activity that can help provide an individual with a sense of fulfilment and satisfaction (Selk, 2016). Seligman (2011) believes that accomplishment is a key element for wellbeing, and it is “often pursued for its own sake” (p.18). He found that people still seek accomplishment even when it holds no meaning, no positive emotions and no positive relationships. Student A mentioned she felt a similar way in her interviews. She found that after completing a work she felt proud and pleased with a sense of achievement. Even if the artwork wasn't a success, she still felt a sense of completion. The students also reported feeling a sense of accomplishment after learning a new artistic skill. In Reynolds (2010) he found that art-making enhanced his participants levels of satisfaction and provided them with opportunities to learn and develop. It would seem that artmaking is a versatile activity that provides a sense of accomplishment when completing an artwork, even when the end product of the artmaking it different than initially expected. It also provides a multitude of learning opportunities for individuals to explore, which creates opportunities for students to gain a sense of accomplishment.

### **Meaning (Identity, Future and Purpose)**

People crave meaning and purpose in their lives. Martin Seligman believes that to have a meaningful life, an individual must feel a sense of belonging to, and serve something greater than their selves (Seligman, 2011). Student B reported that he originally struggled with his identity and meaning in life. On his journey to forming his identity, he found that art was able to aid in his discovery. Through his artmaking, he was able to explore concepts that

had meaning to him by using himself as subject matter. Artmaking also exposed him to an art community which provided him with a sense of belonging. In the interviews, he discussed the idea of art being a possible career choice or lifelong hobby in his future. He would love to generate an income from his passion and make meaningful commissions for others. Student A also reported she found meaning through her artmaking, and believes it is a big part of her life. She would like to continue art through her future and has already begun taking the steps towards a meaningful career as an artist. Both students have used art to find meaning and develop a sense of purpose in the relatively early stages of their lives.

### **Mixed Emotional Outcomes and Grit**

During this study the students experienced a variety of emotions. They reported experiencing both positive and negative emotions when engaged in their artmaking process. Bayles and Orland (2001) discussed this idea that art can be both positive and rewarding but also negative and difficult. They found that many artists can have fears when making art and can even get discouraged by these negative emotions. Through the interview process both students identified a variety of negative emotions connected to art. The students reported feeling upset, annoyed, embarrassed, disappointment, stress, jittery, unsure, judged, hurt and fear. However, neither discussed feeling discouraged from art and rather were seeking to develop and improve their art abilities. Bayles and Orland (2001) believe in order to survive as an artist, they need to confront these fears and negative emotions. This natural interest in art, and an ability to persevere against internal and external judgement, is referred to as grit. Angela Duckworth (2016) defines grit as being comprised of two components, passion and perseverance. The students demonstrated this through their ability to work towards and complete goals, and also showing determination when faced with challenges.

### **Impact of Time In Nature**

Roger Walsh (2011) believes that time in nature is key to having a healthy lifestyle. Time in nature can help improve a person's cognitive function and aids in relaxation (Walsh, 1999; Berman, Jonides, & Kaplan, 2008). During the literature review studies were discussed that explore these ideas. In particular, Eisen, Ulrich, Shepley, Varni and Sherman (2008) conducted a study on how artworks with nature subject matter impacted patients in hospitals. They discovered that nature artworks had a positive effect on their wellbeing, showing improvements in their blood pressure and respiratory rates. Nanda, Eisen, Zadeh and Owen (2010) also had similar results, as their study found nature art had a positive effect on patients' anxiety and agitation.

In this study the students were asked if they make artworks using nature as inspiration. Student B said he sometimes uses nature as inspiration, but it's not a major subject he explores. For Student A, nature is a massive influence in her art and she spends a lot of time outside finding inspiration. She lives surrounded by the Australian bush and state forests and it is possible art allows her to connect to her environment.

### **Chapter Summary**

Artmaking has been found to have a positive effect on the wellbeing of a variety of individuals in various settings such as hospital and schools. This study explored how artmaking has impacted the wellbeing of students and the many ways in which it helped students achieve a high sense of wellbeing. Art was able to provide students with positive emotions, engagement, positive relationships, accomplishments, meaning, grit, management strategies and a connection to nature. These different factors have positively impacted the students' wellbeing. It is therefore suggested that artmaking is a great activity and resource to help students improve their wellbeing.

## CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION

### **What has the study uncovered?**

This study aimed to explore if artmaking could help improve the wellbeing of students in schools. The driving question for this study is:

*What impact does artmaking in school have on two senior high school student's wellbeing?*

Through the data collection and analysis process the study uncovered that artmaking can have an impact on students' wellbeing and enhance their wellbeing in multiple ways. Artmaking was found to be a meaningful activity for the students and this enabled them to experience a range of positive and negative emotions. They were passionate in their artmaking and this enabled them to continue with their artwork and push through and achieve a sense of accomplishment. Artmaking was also found to be a great management strategy to either escape or move past stress, anxiety or depression. Artmaking also helped students to form connections to others and build positive relationships which provided them with a sense of belonging and identity. It also was able to connect them to elements of our world such as nature and spirituality. Lastly, it gave them a sense of purpose and meaning in their lives. In this way they feel that they can contribute to the world through their artmaking which has provided them with a pathway to a successful future.

Following are the answers to the research questions posed at the beginning of the study.

#### **1. Do the students acknowledge a connect between their artmaking and wellbeing, and understand how it affects them?**

Through the interview process the students reported feeling a connection between their wellbeing and artmaking. They acknowledged that their artmaking impacted their wellbeing in multiple ways. The students understood that artmaking has a positive effect on their wellbeing and especially on their levels of happiness. Artmaking has enabled them to experience a range of positive emotions (this will be discussed further in the next section). Artmaking has given them opportunities to experience high levels of engagement which has resulted in experiencing states of flow. It also provides them with a sense of accomplishment when completing a work, or learning a new skill, and enabled them to use art as a management tool for their negativity. However, even though the students recognise and

understand this connection, they were realistic about the role of artmaking in their lives. They felt that if artmaking was not available to them they would use other management strategies that would also bring them happiness.

#### Reflective Journal Entry

“The Students both identified a connection between their artmaking and wellbeing. However, the students seemed to place different values on their artmaking. Student A appeared to express a neutral connection to art as she felt if art was not available she had other activities to use. While Student B placed a large amount of value on his art connection to his wellbeing. This could be because he has less passions or hobbies than Student A.” 10/7/18

## **2. Has their artmaking helped them to feel more positive about life?**

The students reported that artmaking did have a positive effect on their lives. Artmaking was able to give them a sense of meaning and a possible career path in art for their future. It also helped the students find a sense of belonging through connecting them to others, both in the art community and with friends and family. Student B was able to develop his identity through his artmaking process by exploring himself in his artmaking and discovering an area of passion/meaning. Artmaking was able to aid the students in these different areas and has had a positive effect on their quality of life. When the students were asked about how they would rate their life with or without art, both the students acknowledge that their life would be affected negatively if art was not part of their life. Although, the students did have different values upon how much impact it would have on their life.

#### Reflective Journal Entry

“One thing that stood out in the second interviews was the difference in the students’ ratings of their life with and without art. Student A on a normal day would rate herself a 6 or 7. Meaning she seems to rate her life as average to slightly above average. When asked to take art out of the picture she said her wellbeing might go down, but it depends on the circumstance. However, she did go on to say that she would feel frustrated if art wasn’t available when she wanted it. Student B had a different perspective, on a normal day he rates his wellbeing around and 8 or a 9, but when asked if art was taken out of the equation he said this would make him a 6 or 7. I found this very interesting as the Student B drops down to Student A’s normal day rating.” 20/6/18

### 3. Do schools provide a good environment for students' artmaking?

The students expressed their fondness for their art classroom and teachers. They loved being in a classroom with other art students who have different styles and interests, as they are able to teach and inspire each other through their artmaking. However, the main element the students expressed a great appreciation for was their teachers. The students reported that their teachers were both passionate about art and passionate about sharing their knowledge with their students. Their teachers were described as being encouraging and pushed them to experiment with their artmaking. They provided a great supportive element for the students' art journeys. One thing I noticed during my visits to the school was the amazing art room environment the students were experiencing and documented in my art journal.

#### Reflective Journal Entry

“While at the interviews today I was given the option to choose where to interview the students. The art room facilities were fantastic, they had multiple rooms and even small rooms and storage upstairs. There was countless room for students to spread out and explore their artmaking. Even the decoration in the room was artistic and eclectic, just like an art studio.” 06/05/18

### Recommendation for Schools

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are proposed for schools to consider:

#### 1. Schools Should Measure the Wellbeing of Students.

Schools need to collect and use qualitative and quantitative evidence to inform and guide school planning for the wellbeing of students (NSW Department of Education and Communities, 2015). Both the students in this study struggled with their wellbeing and the school was not always aware of their level of wellbeing. Research has shown student whole of school wellbeing interventions can improve levels of student wellbeing and academic performance (Walters, 2011) however results from different programs vary. Good data is required to give feedback to allow programs to be modified and adjusted so that they are giving students and schools maximum benefit.

## **2. Provide Quality Subjects for Students.**

Gore, Lloyd, Smith, Bowe, Ellis and Lubans (2017) expressed the need for quality in school subject areas, as this will help students experience higher levels of engagement, accomplishment and academic performance. This study has found that students benefit from engagement in a quality subject at school and this engagement helps to strengthen their wellbeing. From this study we know that Visual Arts can provide students with a sense of engagement and accomplishment, which are key factors for achieving a high sense of wellbeing. In a similar way, other school subjects could offer experiences that can enhance their wellbeing (Bundick, Quaglia, Corso and Haywood, 2014). Other subjects may enable students with different intelligences to engage and find their passion (Robinson and Aronica, 2009). Students do not experience this impact on their wellbeing as a matter of course, but rather occurs as a result of intentional activity by schools and school teachers (Bundick, Quaglia, Corso and Haywood, 2014). In this study, students reported that they enjoyed their subjects in school, particularly Visual Arts, and both expressed their gratitude for having passionate teachers.

## **3. Make Good Strategic Use of Art Education**

Offering quality art subjects in schools could potentially see all art students gaining a similar effect on their wellbeing as the participants in this study. For those students who are ‘picture smart’ (Gardner, 1983), involvement in art and artmaking could significantly enhance their wellbeing. As schools are commissioned to holistically develop their students (White, 1903) art education could make a significant contribution to the lives of these students and should not be taken for granted.

## **4. Promote Art as an Extra Curriculum Activity.**

Australian schools have always had a passion for sport and performing arts and many schools provide extra curriculum activities for students in the areas of sport and music (Chesters and Smith, 2015). But what about the students with different multiple intelligences who have interests outside of these areas? Schools should be looking to provide a breath of extra curriculum activities to engage as many students as possible can engage in an activity they are passionate about. This study explored how artmaking as an activity has a positive effect on students’ wellbeing and found it had positive impacts on their sense of happiness, relationships and meaning. As an outcome of this study, Schools should look to incorporate art as both a curricular and extra curriculum activity for students.

During the interviews for this study students discussed how they enjoyed having art spaces made available to them to explore their passion for art during school. Often their teachers would allow the students to come in and use the space during their free time. Student A in particular, found this helpful when she felt there was nowhere to go at lunch or was having trouble with other students. Having the art rooms available would allow her to go to a space where she felt comfortable and could utilise her passion for art to increase her wellbeing. This was not advertised as an art club or extra curriculum activity by the school, just something the art teachers were providing for the students. If this availability was more intentional more students could benefit. Therefore, schools should consider the idea of providing room availability, and extra curriculum activities such as art clubs, for students who have other interests in art and artmaking.

### **5. Increase Student Connectedness Through Art.**

Student B expressed that he liked having art spaces available due to the way they can enhance the art community. He thought art clubs in schools are a great idea as people could come in and share their skills and help each other develop in a shared passion. In this way students formed an art community with an enhanced sense of belonging. The level of school connectedness that students experience as school is important as connectedness directly influences student wellbeing (Riekie, 2016). Having a sense of belonging and connectedness in school can engage students in learning and enhance their mental health (KidsMatter, 2018). Art classes, clubs and events are great for bringing like-minded or similar people together to participate in a shared interest or activity. This can provide students with opportunities to build positive relationships and gain a sense of belonging. As mentioned above, Student B believes that art can be a great social activity that can help for a sense of community. If other students also experienced this schools may see increased engagement at school, higher levels of academic achievement, school completion, reductions in anti-social or disruptive behaviours, and lower rates of health-risk behaviour (Australian Catholic University and Erebus International, 2008).

### **6. Help Student Develop Management Strategies.**

As many students in schools today report they have experienced anxiety, and other factors affecting their wellbeing, it is important that school teach students how to manage and possibly overcome these issues. Walsh (2011) believes it is important for a person's wellbeing that they have management strategies for stress and relaxation. This study found that art was being used as a management tool to help the students manage and escape from



their negativity. Student A was able to use art as an effective management strategy while Student B was also able to use art to explore his obstacles and surpass them. Therefore, schools could help students to utilise artmaking, or other activities of interest, as management strategies for when they are experiencing negativity in their lives.

### **Limitations of the Study**

This research inquiry had some restrictions which placed certain limitations on the study. The study was restricted in its number of participants, time of data collection and the location of data collection. The study had no budget and a time restriction of six months. This time restraint affected the location of the data collection. Selecting a local high school made the data collection efficient and convenient with respect to location and time. The study included two students from the local high school who volunteered to participate. Therefore, the data came from one school and did not explore other student school experiences in other art classrooms across Australia.

### **Future Research**

Due to the limitations of the study, future research could explore a larger amount of data from a range of locations. Gaining data from students of all ages across Australia could provide a deeper understanding and knowledge of artmaking connection to students' wellbeing. Also, as both the students in this study had art as a hobby and a subject at school, it would be interesting to see the perspective of students who only participate in art at school. Another suggest for future reach is to explore the other subjects in school to see if they contribute a similar impact on student wellbeing.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion this study's findings suggest that artmaking can be used in schools, and in general life, to positively effect a person's wellbeing. Artmaking was found to have many positive factors that can help a person achieve a higher sense of wellbeing. In particular, the subject of Visual Arts in schools could provide students with opportunities and resources to help improve their wellbeing. At a time when students are struggling with low levels of wellbeing, schools need a whole of school approach to student wellbeing and it would seem that Visual Arts is one subject that could play a role in improving the wellbeing of students in schools in Australia.

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