Interview with Georgeann Haas, March 4, 2008

Title:

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Description:

Interview with Georgeann Haas, who serves as the Supervisor for Arts Education for New Hanover County Schools. Here, she discusses the state of arts education in New Hanover County, her own experience teaching art at the secondary level, and the future of art instruction.

Repository:

UNCW Archives and Special Collections

Transcript:

Interviewee: Haas, GeorgeannInterviewer: Hayes, ShermanDate of Interview: 3/4/2008Series: ArtsLength 90 minutes

Hayes: Good morning.

Haas: Good morning.

Hayes: We're here today with Georgeann Haas.

Haas: Correct.

Hayes: Okay, great. And what is your title, just so that the record is here?

Haas: Currently, I am the Supervisor for Arts Education for New Hanover Country Schools.

Hayes: Okay, great. My name is Sherman Hayes and I am the University Librarian for UNCW, Randall Library. And with part of our art interview, Georgeann is a visual artist herself, as far as training and background, which we'll talk to, and represents hundreds of teachers currently and over

the past, who have worked in the visual arts in the schools. And it's a large program that we're going to speak to. But we've got two levels here, you as a person, as an artist and how it fits in with you as a teacher and administrator. But before we get rolling on that, why don't you just go back and set us up for how you got to Wilmington, in other words, a little bit before you jumped into all of this.

Haas: Wow, that's way back. My husband and I both graduated from East Carolina University with degrees in art. He was a painting major and I had an education major.

Hayes: What is your husband's name?

Haas: His name is Doug. And we moved to Wilmington. I'll go back even further and tell you that I didn't really ever want to be an art teacher originally. I wanted to be an artist. And my dad said if I'm going to send you to college, you really need to have a backup plan.

Hayes: Boy, have we heard that a few times.

Haas: So, I did that really with no intentions of ever teaching.

Hayes: Are you from _____ area?

Haas: I am from Whiteville, North Carolina.

Hayes: Oh, Whiteville, great, that's our territory.

Haas: Right there on the _____.

Hayes: You know, I was talking to somebody about Whiteville, did you take art there? [inaudible].

Haas: I had no art in public school. I took some private lessons from Martha Burns [ph?] and some folks around town.

Hayes: We have some of her work, Martha Burns.

Haas: Yes. But we didn't have art in schools at that time. But my family...

Hayes: So, this would have been the '70s, '60s.

Haas: Well, I graduated from high school in 1971.

Hayes: So, you're saying there really wasn't any program to speak of 35, 36 years ago.

Haas: No.

Hayes: Okay.

Haas: So, everything that I had was from my family. My grandfather was an artist, my uncle was an artist, my dad does a little pen and ink drawing, so, sort of family thing.

Hayes: So, what was your maiden name?

Haas: McNeil [ph?].

Hayes: McNeil.

Haas: And I think you might have interviewed my dad with the Iwo Jima-- there was some archival work done [inaudible].

Hayes: And what was your father's name?

Haas: Hector McNeil [ph?].

Hayes: Oh, Hector McNeil. So, is your uncle Johnny?

Haas: John.

Hayes: That means your cousins got to be Sandy [ph?] and--

Haas: Ron.

Hayes: Ron, okay.

Haas: And many more.

Hayes: No, I'm thinking there was a-- connected heavily to UNCW. So, you are the McNeils from...

Haas: From Whiteville.

Hayes: Whiteville and Lake Waccamaw.

Haas: Exactly.

Hayes: There is another segment there. Well, that's great. That's an interesting connection. So, lots

of them were artists?

Haas: Yes. We grew up around a lot of artwork and musicians and _____.

Hayes: Interesting. Were your family also then in the pharmacy business?

Haas: My father left the pharmacy business and became an independent insurance agent.

Hayes: Okay. But not in an art field, that's [inaudible].

Haas: No. But he's-- still it was a very creative family.

Hayes: That's great. Okay, that's interesting context.

Haas: You've established a context.

Hayes: Well, you never know who's connected to whom.

Haas: Right. But anyway, when I first became married, I took a teaching job here in Wilmington at Williston Middle School, or actually it was Williston Ninth Grade Center [ph?] at the time. But I really sort of fell in love with teaching. It was one of those things I didn't expect to happen. Then I stayed out of the teaching profession for about 12 years and I raised my children. And during that time, I did a lot of my own work and exhibited that work and that's probably a lot of the work that you have seen came from that period.

Hayes: So, at ECU, you took a joint program, in other words, to be in education but you then still had to take all of the studio art.

Haas: Sure.

Hayes: And you are a painter by...

Haas: Painter.

Hayes: Painter, okay. Any other areas that you've dabbled in besides painting?

Haas: You have to do a little bit of everything. But painting was my major. So, I sort of fell in love with teaching, still enjoyed the production part. Came back into the education part when my children were in school and I had a little bit of time. We had to plan to send them to college, so did that. Fell in love with teaching again. I mean, I really love both parts. They're both art forms and they're both a

science. So, it's kind of an interesting perspective.

Hayes: What level did you come into teaching _____.

Haas: I began at the middle school.

Hayes: Right, that's what you said.

Haas: But eventually wound up at the high school.

Hayes: Oh, you did?

Haas: Yes.

Hayes: Which high school?

Haas: I was at Laney High School for the last five years that I taught.

Hayes: Interesting. Was that fairly new at that point?

Haas: No, it wasn't fairly new. We opened the new art wing during my tenure there, which was a wonderful experience.

Hayes: So, they added on to the high school?

Haas: Yes.

Hayes: Oh that was nice.

Haas: Yes.

Hayes: And you got a chance to dig through all of the equipment and _____.

Haas: I came after all of those decisions were made. I got to walk into the new building, which was really _____.

Hayes: That was good.

Haas: Well I was a part of the creation of the art room at Ashley High School, which came about while I was here. But at Laney I just had the wonderful experience of walking into this fabulous facility. And...

Hayes: It makes a big difference, picking the art, doesn't it? I mean, the setting, the _____.

Haas: It makes a big difference. And the students would walk into the building and they just sort of stood up straighter and it made a difference.

Hayes: That's interesting.

Haas: It really made a difference. But that was a wonderful time of working with high school students. And I have some of their artwork in my office. The fish up there on the wall are from a former student.

Hayes: High school art teacher, the kids that take yours, are they basically taking that as an elective, so you get a positive sense. In other words, I always know that some teachers get the kids that don't necessarily want to be there. Did you find that because it was elective, you then had kind of slightly a different set of students?

Haas: At the beginning, in their ninth grade year, a lot of students explore. And sometimes they find themselves in art classes and they realize, this is not where they want to be. So, that beginning entry level course, you get a little bit of everything, which is great. And I always insisted on teaching at least one beginning art core course because once they get past that level, they really don't even need you after a point. I mean, they're so motivated with their own work that you're really a facilitator. But that beginning class makes you realize, you know, you really do have to teach.

Hayes: Now, did you always have the art history component in that too?

Haas: Yes.

Hayes: Because that's different from the studio.

Haas: Yes.

Hayes: And you felt like you had good preparation out of school for that? I mean, that's kind of a different world.

Haas: I took a lot of art history in college. But I also had a great experience during my 12 year, I call it my 12 year sabbatical, I guess, where I did all sorts of great things.

Hayes: But unpaid sabbatical.

Haas: Yes, exactly. It was very unpaid.

Hayes: Very unpaid sabbatical.

Haas: But I had an opportunity to teach some art history courses at UNCW.

Hayes: Oh, did you really?

Haas: So, I taught some beginning art history courses and that is where I really I got-- and of course if you teach it, you learn it.

Hayes: Who were some of the faculty there that _____ worked with?

Haas: Margie Worthington [ph?].

Hayes: Good.

Haas: And I'm completely drawing a blank on John...

Hayes: John Myers?

Haas: Thank you. John Myers is the person who called me and asked me to teach the course.

Hayes: You know, John is in phased retirement right now.

Haas: Yes.

Hayes: And is actually going to be writing kind of the introductory history for this website that you'll be part of, so, John's still going strong.

Haas: Yes. He called during that time and said he was going to become Department Chair and asked if I would be interested in picking up some of the intro courses, art history. And I did. Loved every minute of it, it was fabulous.

Hayes: In a sense, you know, the intro courses are in a way kind of a sales course. And I don't know if they are in high school, but at the university level, they are. They are a way to say, are you serious about art? Do you want to get involved? Did you find that kids from ninth grade, some of them actually then came into art as a major thing?

Haas: Sure.

Hayes: You said they were exploring.

Haas: They were exploring. The thing at the ninth grade level was making sure that they found something that appealed to them that was-- many of them would not grow up to be artists. But we're all going to be consumers. You know, we're all going to live in our culture. So, it was relating the things about art to everyday life.

Hayes: Oh, good.

Haas: So, we talked a lot about, you may not become a painter, but you're going to buy a car and you need to understand design and form and function. Or, you're going to wear clothes; you're going to make choices. You make esthetic choices everyday.

Hayes: Now, are the ninth grade general courses-- I don't know if they've changed that much since then, do they have any hands on?

Haas: Oh, yes. It's all...

Hayes: It's not a lecture.

Haas: No.

Hayes: At the university sometimes when you do the general introduction it can be pretty dry and cut. They separate that studio from history. And this was not.

Haas: No.

Hayes: In none of the schools.

Haas: No.

Hayes: All right, so when you're talking about an art teacher in the public schools for North Carolina in total, for every class then, is a hands on...

Haas: K-12.

Hayes: K through 12.

Haas: K through 12.

Hayes: I think that's important to note, because that's different than the academic model that sometimes grows up at the university level.

Haas: Right.

Hayes: The reason is even people who do continued education sometimes just talk about art, but you did _____.

Haas: Oh, yes. Always have.

Hayes: And would you do all kinds of art?

Haas: All kinds of art, yes.

Hayes: So, you're exposing them to a--

Haas: Exactly. We painted, we did print backing, we papier mached, we worked with clay, we made sculpture, we did-- I mean, and within that we infused the art history. It was not a separate entity. So, if they were studying painting, you brought in examples of painters.

Hayes: And when you say it was more teaching it's because they had very little background.

Haas: Very little background. Well, they had some, because all of our students have art from K through five. Every student gets art every week.

Hayes: Now, how long has that been the case?

Haas: Since I've been here. And I know it was prior. The 10 years prior to my--

Hayes: We're talking a long long history...

Haas: We're talking twenty or more years, yes.

Hayes: ...where an art teacher is an integral part of the elementary school program.

Haas: Yes, here in New Hanover County, that has been the case.

Hayes: Okay. Obviously it was not the case in Whiteville when you grew up.

Haas: Right.

Hayes: Would you say, in Whiteville it is today? Can you speak to the whole state or does it vary quite a bit?

Haas: I really can't speak to the whole state. I do know that in Whiteville, they have, there's a fabulous art teacher at the Whiteville High School now. So, I know bits and pieces and probably just enough to be dangerous, but I know that they have some very good teachers.

Hayes: Well, we're not going to hold you to the-- to a survey of state practices. New Hanover County.

Haas: I can talk to New Hanover County.

Hayes: Okay, that's good. I wanted to go back in your production period and ask about the dichotomy that we keep hearing from all artists, but particularly artist teachers, which is the challenge of maintaining your own art if you're a teacher. Have you found that in your-- now you did two separate ways, but did you give up your art when you came back to teaching.

Haas: Pretty much.

Hayes: Really?

Haas: Yes.

Hayes: Because we have one of your pieces right outside my office, it's an abstract. Was that a style that you did?

Haas: Yes, that's pretty typical of what I've always done. It's very difficult, I think, to keep the energy level. It's high energy for me, and total focus.

Hayes: As a teacher.

Haas: As a teacher and as an artist. It was very difficult to have the energy to do both. And one of the reasons that-- I sort of piddle now, I do things for me. But I'm not in that production mode where...

Hayes: What about summer? Can you sort of turn it back on in the summer or not?

Haas: I'm 12 months.

Hayes: You're 12 months now, but how about those years when you were teaching high school?

Haas: Not really. It was very hard to shift those gears. And in teaching art, what I've found is you're walking around the room and let's say you have 27 art students in your high school classroom.

Hayes: Would that be typical?

Haas: That would be typical.

Hayes: Okay. Wow.

Haas: They are making decisions. They are asking you for help in helping them to make decisions. Not that you're making their esthetic choices, but you are guiding them. You're saying what would happen, what do you think would happen if you did this? That's exhausting, you know, because you are really coming up with creative solutions in a roundabout way.

Hayes: All the time.

Haas: Yes, all the time.

Hayes: And you're not up front lecturing per se.

Haas: You're walking around. You're sitting down sometimes while they're working and you're talking to them about what they're doing. And sometimes they're saying, I know this isn't right, but I'm not really sure what to do here.

Hayes: Are the questions as you move past that first stage, are they technique questions? Are they theory questions? Are they subject questions or all questions?

Haas: All questions.

Hayes: All questions.

Haas: And I think the biggest challenge in working with students is to get them to trust their instincts. You know, I would sometimes take their work up and go, you really know what you need to do. You know inside of you. But we have learned to distrust that because we think there's a right or wrong.

Hayes: Boy, that's for sure. They're going to go to another class that is right or wrong.

Haas: Exactly, exactly. It can have dire consequences. But it's teaching them that you really can trust what you know. And so, we would sometimes look at the piece together and they would come back later and go, I think I need to do this. Good choice, that's a good choice.

Hayes: When you were teaching, before you became the administrator, you always said you would do one section of the general course, right?

Haas: Yes.

Hayes: Then what else would you teach? Did you have choices in what else you taught?

Haas: Well, I taught a lot of the honors courses. And in North Carolina, juniors and seniors at the high school level have an option to take an honors course in art.

Hayes: What does that _____?

Haas: Well, that means they get some weighted credit.

Hayes: Extra credit.

Haas: Yes. It's credit, which is great because you can do that in English, you can do that in math, you can do that in other subjects. So, art is right up there with everything else in terms of having those honors levels.

Hayes: And what does that mean, honors level? I don't know _____.

Haas: It means that there is some additional requirements that the state has put in place. There is actually an honors curriculum. So, it actually has...

Hayes: More, is there more?

Haas: It's more rigorous standards. So, I did teach a lot of those classes.

Hayes: Would they be sub specialties or just honors art?

Haas: It would be honors art, but within that, the kids had choices. They had choices as to how, what mediums they wanted to use. They were beginning to sort of set their own ideas of what kind of series maybe they wanted do to do.

Hayes: But you didn't have, at the high school level, a painting class, a ceramics class.

Haas: You do, actually.

Hayes: You do have them.

Haas: Yes, we have ceramics at the high school level; we have photography at the high school level. Now within art two, for example, you would have drawing, painting, you know print making--

Hayes: Traditional.

Haas: Traditional. You would do explorations. But the curriculum allows students to make some choices. In other words, the problem of the day or of the week, might not be painting, it might be, we're going to explore symbols. So, it might be a concept. And then children might choose the medium that they wanted to use to explore that subject. So, it's more about ideas.

Hayes: Did the honors classes then shrink in size too?

Haas: Yes.

Hayes: By definition just because fewer people--

Haas: Right, they would, but not a lot.

Hayes: Not a lot. Still pretty good _____.

Haas: Yes.

Hayes: In a previous conversation over the phone, you had talked about kind of the rigor of public school art that you thought that the public doesn't really understand. So, let's talk a little bit about that. The public I don't think knows the guidance of a curriculum. What does that mean? When you say there's a curriculum, what does that mean?

Haas: North Carolina has something called a standard course of study and it's in all subject areas. It is a very minimal curriculum and it was put into place to ensure that all children got basically the same-- they were exposed to the same things.

Hayes: All across the state.

Haas: Across the state of North Carolina. It is not all that you teach, it is the basic requirements that

you teach. So, it is a minimal requirement. If you look at that in the arts K-12, it's really a great curriculum. You work on the concepts of art. You work on things like variety and balance and the principles of art. You talk about the design elements. You learn about line and color and texture and those kinds of things. You learn how to make art. So, a lot of it has to do with the hands on creation of art. Within that curriculum there are opportunities for children to express themselves. You know, to come up with their own ideas. They also learn about other cultures through the curriculum, the history of art.

Hayes: Now, this is starting right in kindergarten?

Haas: Kindergarten, it starts in Kindergarten.

Hayes: So, every teacher who is an art specialist then has kind of a guiding set to get started.

Haas: Yes.

Hayes: And they have to bring then, their own training to that.

Haas: Which is the beauty of this curriculum because what you have, you have guidelines. They don't say you have to do two weeks of painting. There's ways that you can teach line. You can teach the study of line through sculpture, through so many different forms. But, you're teaching those ideas. The technique is just a vehicle. The project is just a vehicle to teach the concepts.

Hayes: Let me ask you the controversial question that is always out there. Given the kind of current wave of test test test test, how do the arts in general, because you're coordinator of more than just visual arts, how do you get pulled into that, say at the elementary school level? How do you know if you're doing a good job with line and concept and so forth? Are you forced to give a test? A grade--?

Haas: No.

Hayes: Do you see what I'm saying?

Haas: I see what you're saying.

Hayes: It's a little different than a math test where they say here's a set of problems that you better be able to do in 20 minutes. You've got to draw a picture in 10 minutes and a panel looks at it.

Haas: No, there's not that kind of critique.

Hayes: I'm just curious because that is kind of a mood now. And the soft arts, which I think most of us want for children, how do you-- if you got pulled into that?

Haas: Well, the arts are a way of thinking. Kids have to think. What you learn to do in the arts, which I think is the beauty of what we teach in the public school, which carries over into every part of your life, is you learn to problem solve. The arts are about solving problems. You learn to think about problems as opportunities, to think in creative ways. I mean, what's going to save our world is going to be the people who can look at a problem in a new way. And so that's what the arts do, it's all about thinking, it's all about thinking. So, we have something really important to contribute to learning. And people who really understand that, and most of the people that I work with totally get that, that a child can't just be tested. They just can't learn math. That would be like if I had this body, if I only took care of my teeth, I would not be in a good way.

Hayes: You'd have good teeth.

Haas: I'd have good teeth. But if we are presented with a child in our school system and we only take care of their math, we haven't really done them justice.

Hayes: Now, this is predictable coming from you, which I'm really glad to hear. And actually I agree with it as far as a kind of a well rounded person that we need to produce. But over the years, whenever things have gotten tight, arts and particularly visual arts have always been held up as frivolous. Have you ever had to fight those battles?

Haas: That has not been my experience.

Hayes: Good. Okay.

Haas: It has not been my experience.

Hayes: Now, throughout the country, I...

Haas: Throughout the country...

Hayes: And your own experience in a small rural town...

Haas: Absolutely.

Hayes: ...that wasn't the first thing that they added, when you don't have enough money. And also getting teachers who want to come and teach art is always a challenge.

Haas: Right. We don't really have that problem, we have a lot of folks.

Hayes: [inaudible]

Haas: I think of the eastern part of the state and the western part of the state really don't have as many problems getting teachers. I think it's the central part and the lower income counties that are really struggling.

Hayes: Some of the real rural areas.

Haas: Really struggling to get teachers. We really don't have...

Hayes: Good. We have a good supply, particularly in, we were talking visual arts, but also in your position, have music. What else do you...

Haas: Dance, theater. And the music includes chorus, band and orchestra.

Hayes: Okay. So, you're coordinating all of those, that's the role. But today we're on visual arts.

Haas: We're on visual arts today. My experience, and I have been up in here eight years at the central office, we haven't had any money cut. We haven't had any funds cut. We have a pretty good budget. Could we use more money? Absolutely. I mean, who couldn't? You know. It's great, I would love to have more. I could spend every nickel and dime of it. But that hasn't been my experience.

Hayes: I'm less concerned about the money part of it as kind of an intellectual support. And you say that you have that here, people who are in the system and your teachers. And other teachers, do you get support at the elementary school from the other traditional teachers, saying I want art?

Haas: Some do, some don't. I mean, you know, you've got a little bit of everything out there. I tell my art teachers this all the time, I have never had a principal come to me and say, send me a really bad art teacher. They want a really great art teacher. You know, they realize the importance of the students being involved in the arts. Yet, people who understand this, that's what they want for children.

Hayes: And I think parents do too.

Haas: Parents definitely want it for their children. Here again, you never see parents saying, I want the worst education for my child.

Hayes: Now, we talked about the wonderful facilities that you walked into at Laney. And right next to us near this building is the new high school.

Haas: Ashley _____.

Hayes: Ashley. And I bet it's pretty spectacular.

Haas: It's fabulous.

Hayes: What about at the elementary school? The crowding that's going on is-- do they get to have a _____ or how does that work at the elementary school?

Haas: Sometimes they do, sometimes they don't.

Hayes: So, it varies. It's a local...

Haas: It varies, it really, it's a school based decision and the principal's decision as to how they use the space. And they have to make tough calls sometimes. And I don't think will relish the idea of displacing an art teacher, but it happens.

Hayes: But that's not your call.

Haas: No.

Hayes: That's a local decision.

Haas: Right.

Hayes: Now, you said that everybody in K through five does art as part of their kind of big program, really gets into it. What happens in the middle school, which is here a six through eight pattern?

Haas: Students may elect to take arts courses as electives.

Hayes: So, they don't necessarily all take them.

Haas: No.

Hayes: So, then really the elementary-- a fifth grader is usually about ll or 12. That's when there's the first intensive part of it, as the curriculum goes away.

Haas: Right.

Hayes: What's your experience with middle school kids? You must have some data on how many take-- now you probably look at all the arts.

Haas: Right.

Hayes: So, what about visual arts? How many kids opt in? Any sense of--

Haas: Well, I can't give you a percentage. But I tell you, the middle school concept is that children explore. They really-- we don't want to say, it's time for you to lock into, you know, something at this point. Because nobody knows at that age what they want to do.

Hayes: We're talking about 12, 14, 15.

Haas: Yes. So, hopefully they take a little art, they take a little music, maybe they take some career type courses where they're...

Hayes: And who's making those choices? That's the kids and their parents?

Haas: The kids and the parents.

Hayes: And the counselors? Is there a set of counselors that help?

Haas: Yes.

Hayes: And then do you end up in a sense working with those counselors to try to say don't forget the arts as--

Haas: Right. And they're very good about that. Like I said, nobody cancelled out. It gets tougher at the high school, because kids start to have to make some choices.

Hayes: Okay. So, tell us what happens there, what happens in the high school?

Haas: The high school, they're having to choose between, do I take this AP class, which is an advanced placement class, because I want to get into a certain university. So, choices become a little tougher.

Hayes: Other than the general first class, you said ninth graders may still be exploring, past that has the student, in essence with our current system, said, art is going to be a concentration? In other words do you get people who have to concentrate in art to take any more?

Haas: No. I taught at Laney, there were many times when I would have students who were excellent art students but went on to do something completely different. But they enjoyed their art.

Hayes: But can you take one or two classes?

Haas: Oh, yes, yes.

Hayes: Okay. Because at the university level, it's very quickly after your first year of exploration you pick a major and you're done for.

Haas: Right. No, not at the high school level.

Hayes: And they don't have advanced placement in art.

Haas: We actually do.

Hayes: Oh, really?

Haas: We do have at New Hanover High School right now, we have an advanced placement studio course.

Hayes: A studio course?

Haas: Yes.

Hayes: And that would then qualify them to not have to take the first studio course at a university if they went into that.

Haas: Right.

Hayes: Interesting.

Haas: It's based on...

Hayes: Now that must be people who are very serious about art as a major career or-- Interesting.

Haas: Right. Sure. We have a wide range of options for students at all levels to really fit in somewhere.

Hayes: One of the interesting trends that-- particularly in our project, and I see in the art world is kind of the breaking down of art and craft. It's always been tough to know what the difference was. But more and more people are into craft and more and more museums are collecting kind of a high craft as art. Do you have any opportunity to shift over into any of those traditional things, I guess, pottery is the closest, ceramics, but I mean, this would be some of the traditional basket weaving or any that would be coming more as a craft element?

Haas: Some of that is woven into the curriculum. And when you hire an art teacher, they're going to have a strength. They're going to teach the whole curriculum, but if that person is a basket weaver and it's high quality basket weaving, I sure hope they will bring that strength to the curriculum, because like I said before, they are not teaching-- the curriculum is about concepts.

Hayes: Okay, good.

Haas: And you can certainly teach art concepts through basket weaving.

Hayes: Right. Well, I know one of your teachers, I was talking to him, is a metalsmith jewelry maker or something. No, this may be Brunswick County, but you know, that would be the same challenge. His real training is in metalsmithing, you wouldn't expect a high school to necessarily have a metalsmith lab.

Haas: Right.

Hayes: But I guess if that person was willing to work something out, then management would say, as long as it covers the concept and it's art.

Haas: Right.

Hayes: You don't want the art teacher teaching music. Or maybe not. And we don't.

Haas: Right. And in North Carolina, you really can't do that because a lot of it is No Child Left Behind, which I'm sure you've heard tons and tons about. Art, the arts are core.

Hayes: Okay, what does that mean?

Haas: That means that we...

Hayes: C-O-R-E, right?

Haas: We are core, just like math is core, English is core, it is considered a core subject.

Hayes: Is there anything that isn't considered a core subject?

Haas: I think there are a few, but we won't even go there. But anyway, with that comes some requirements for licensure. In other words, if you're going to teach art or music or theater-- no, theater is not one of them, you have to be highly qualified.

Hayes: So, you just can't say, I did art in high school and I love art and so I now get to be a teacher. You must have an art degree.

Haas: You must have an art degree.

Hayes: Well, art education.

Haas: Art education degree.

Hayes: Right. So, you have to get that licensure for an education depending on which level it is, right? But then you want to see an art degree concentration.

Haas: Well, everybody has-- in order to have an arts education, you're going to have to have some concentration in an area, that's just part of the _____.

Hayes: So all of your teachers, from K through 12th...

Haas: Licensed.

Hayes: Licensed. Are you also encouraging then the master's level, because that's a challenge to go on.

Haas: Many do it. You know, that's...

Hayes: In the visual arts area?

Haas: Yes, many many have their master's degrees.

Hayes: Now, would they go more on the education line or the studio line or just-- would you accept either one of those?

Hayes: But then if they did the studio line, we'd have that same issue of...

Haas: Licensure.

Hayes: Well, no, I mean at the master's level.

Haas: Oh, okay.

Hayes: Then how do you keep that up as far as production.

Haas: Right. Yes, if you're going to be paid for-- well, you can't have a master's degree. I don't think they qualify. I'm talking-- you're going to have to cut that out because I'm not sure if that's even true. I'm not sure what the requirements are to be paid for a master's degree, because my master's degree was in arts education.

Hayes: Okay. I would need a more typical thing.

Haas: Right, probably.

Hayes: Right. Talk to me about some of the people over the years who have been visual arts teachers here, just to help us capture some of their history. We can't talk to everybody, but if you've been here for some time.

Haas: Some time.

Hayes: Some time, a veteran and now you're in an administrator position, maybe you have a perspective. Who have been some of the great...

Haas: Oh, there's so many. There's so many _____ ones.

Hayes: They're all _____ ones, I know, but some that you remember. I'm just curious.

Haas: Well, I'll go back to when I was first hired in the county, and Jackie French [ph?], who still works in New Hanover County Schools, and I, worked at Williston together. She's a phenomenal art teacher, absolutely phenomenal. Sarah Jones [ph?], she teaches at New Hanover High School, she teaches that advanced placement course, that's absolutely fabulous. At Laney I taught with some

wonderful, there were three of us, three visual art teachers at Laney. So you know we had a large group of students.

Hayes: Would this be a-- is it still at the high school about three art teachers per [inaudible]?

Haas: New Hanover has two, our other high schools have three or more. So, they're big programs.

Hayes: Just to give a sense, yes.

Haas: At Laney, I taught with Allen Boyd [ph?], who taught ceramics there. He's phenomenal.

Hayes: Is he still there?

Haas: He's still there. Carl Sternelia [ph?] came in to Laney, he kind of picked up my classes, the honors classes. At Ashley High School, Joe Conlith [ph?], wonderful potter. You've got three art teachers there, Shelly Day [ph?] and Angela Hewitt [ph?], all very good. Let's see, at Hoggard, well, we have five at Hoggard.

Hayes: Five?

Haas: Five visual art teachers, one photography teacher and...

Hayes: Why would you just have more, is it just a principal choice over time?

Haas: It can be. A lot of it is based on student interest and the size of the school.

Hayes: Right, obviously.

Haas: Those all come into play.

Hayes: And some _____ teacher who came along and got something started and everybody _____.

Haas: A couple of people-- Shirley Gerhardt [ph?], and she's somebody you probably really need to talk with. Shirley was in the system for a very long time. In fact I took her place at Laney when she retired. Shirley was an amazing art teacher, just absolutely amazing. So, she's somebody you really do need to get in contact with. Bobby Bowman [ph?] was a teacher that was in the school system for a long time. She passed away some years ago. But, very enthusiastic people who had an impact on my own children as they were going through the school system.

Hayes: I'm seeing an interesting pattern here. Maybe we could speak to this. There is a tremendous amount of turnover, generally, in teaching, in New Hanover.

Haas: Oh, yes.

Hayes: And society talks about teachers who are burned out and get out of the field. And yet I'm hearing, in the visual arts in particular kind of an interesting longevity.

Haas: Oh, yes.

Hayes: Is this partly due to the style of teaching or maybe not the testing or just luck on our part. I mean, I'm just saying I didn't hear, you know, they may have some change, but these sounded like veteran people who stayed and stayed and like it.

Haas: Yes, at the elementary level, Lynn Canopi [ph?] just retired a couple of years ago, she was here when I came to the county. There are just so many folks, and I know I'm leaving out lots of them, but I think-- I used to say, when I taught school, I said, I see the best part of children. I see the best part of children. Now, were they perfectly behaved everyday? Absolutely not. But it is a wonderful part of people to see.

Hayes: But, you're also in a coaching mode, which may make a difference too.

Haas: Absolutely.

Hayes: You didn't have to control them all as a group. You didn't want them out of control.

Haas: Right.

Hayes: Did you have helpers lots of times?

Haas: Oh, no.

Hayes: No. Okay. Because I mean, that seems like it would lend itself to, you know, parent or other helpers, in the sense of just supplies and--

Haas: You just set up procedures and you teach the children the procedures. At the high school level it was-- I would say, okay, I'm going to show you how you really need to come in the room and get to work. So, I'd walk outside in the hall, come back in the door, go get my things out for my project, here's where this is located, this is located, and I'm going to sit down and begin my day's

work. And once you teach those procedures, the children know what to do.

Hayes: And so then your aberrance is somebody who doesn't want to follow the procedures.

Haas: Sometimes, or sometimes they would come in and they'd put their head down and you'd just walk over and say, you know what's going on today? Well, I had to work late last night. A lot of kids...

Hayes: So, outside things.

Haas: Lots of outside, mostly outside things. You know, whatever happened in the hall or...

Hayes: But the visual arts are unusual in giving that independent time to learn. And you also know how to product right. I mean, there wasn't just like doodling, right?

Haas: Oh, yes.

Hayes: So, what would be a typical high school approach? You'd have so many projects or a certain painting needs to be done by Tuesday. I mean, what's your milestones?

Haas: Well, we would. I mean we'd have to have lesson plans. You'd look at your standard course of study and you think, okay, I'm going to work on these concepts. And I'm going to choose this particular project. And I always tried to choose projects where each child had enough choice that you wouldn't even know what the project was by the time you looked at all of the products. Everybody's was so different. And it was the way they interpreted it.

Hayes: And you as a teacher knew it was within the project.

Haas: Exactly. You set up the guidelines and the students make choices within that. And then-- but their project doesn't look like anybody else's. Their medium may be completely different because they might have that choice as well.

Hayes: Well, did you have to grade these in the end?

Haas: You do grade them.

Hayes: What goes in the grading?

Haas: You can set up a kind of rubric, like at the very beginning of the project, you talk to the

students about-- okay, let them help you decide. What made an A look like? What are we going to set as our standard for an A?

Hayes: And would the amount of effort also be a part of it?

Haas: Effort is a part of it, because in art-- and sometimes kids would get to the end and they would have bitten off far more than they could chew and their product would be a total flop. But what they learned in that process, it's not all about the product. It had a lot to do with process. Okay, you know, your piece didn't turn out all that great, you're not happy with it, but let's go back and look at what happened. What would you do differently next time? That's what learning is.

Hayes: Did you have some points that you could test on, like vocabulary, concepts, a little bit of history?

Haas: Yes.

Hayes: So you did have some of those kind of [inaudible]?

Haas: Yes, sure. It's not-- you know, but to me it's more about that process, and so they could, you know, at the end of the project they might sit down and say, talk to me about what was right here. What would you do differently? How would you restructure this?

Hayes: That has got to be so foreign to most high school kids.

Haas: It's very difficult.

Hayes: Considering what they get in other classes. Not what they get is bad, but it's just a much more regimented product or where you're going. They don't get to decide anything, I would guess, in English, or math or-- no, that's not fair, they probably get some, but I'm just saying, it is a more structured.

Haas: But isn't that how you live? I mean, as people in society, isn't that what we do? You go to work and you think, I made some mistakes today, I made some wrong decisions, so, I think I'll rethink that and maybe do something differently next time.

Hayes: Well, I think you have a little bit of both. You do have lots of routine and you do have lots of procedures you have to follow and then you have some independence. And many of us strive to get as much independence as a professional enjoyment, right?

Haas: Right.

Hayes: Or even I would argue a great technician or a great craftsman or construction person enjoys, many times the interesting choices that they get to make.

Haas: Right. I think for children, and going back to-- it was very hard for them. They would say, I want to know is it right or is it wrong. Well, you know, I don't know whether it's right or wrong here. Because that's you know--

Hayes: Let me tell you some of the things that are happening at the university, not in visual arts, but in general, we're getting your students, great students at UNCW and they want the top grade. They want to know why they didn't get the top grade and they want to know the rules. And they're mad if they don't get the top grade. This is not all of them.

Haas: Sure.

Hayes: And yet that can't be the case in the art side. So, I mean, the person that wanted to be valedictorian, would they have run away from the art class because it wasn't so straight forward?

Haas: Some did, I mean some would have a very hard-- but many embraced it and said, this is great, this is great.

Hayes: The balance, they wanted the balance.

Haas: Right. And I don't mean that it was totally un-subjective, but I tried to concentrate less on the product and more on the process, so that they...

Hayes: Well, you're doing what real art does, because in our interview patterns, the artist's process is so pinnacle. And many of them are teachers to other artists. I mean, it's always about process. I mean, even product is important. That we as the customer, like you said, see, but we don't always understand what goes into it, do we?

Haas: Right. And I think as an artist, the product, even in my own work was not significant. The process was what was important. And what the product told me generally was what I might want to do the next time.

Hayes: Interesting.

Haas: Or how I might want to change things. But what it made me want to do in the next painting.

Hayes: Do you have any sense that as kids get to be seniors who might talk about, I want to go and be an artist, then does that art teacher play a counseling role? Do you get a lot of that?

Haas: Oh, yes.

Hayes: You know, what I should I do?

Haas: I had a lot of students who wanted to go pursue, particularly at North Carolina School of Design at State. And we would help them with their portfolios. We would work on getting the slides together.

Hayes: So, you would actually teach those concepts.

Haas: Certainly.

Hayes: But not for everybody, just those who were most interested in going forward [inaudible].

Haas: We talked a lot about the presentation of art in all of the classes. How you might go about writing about or speaking about your art. Because a lot of students think you just do it. But as an artist you have to talk about what you're doing. You have to write about what you're doing. And those are also pivotal parts of being an artist. I mean, you don't just do, you must be able to articulate what you have done. And so, we did work on that.

Hayes: Interesting. Do you still in your position as administrator, do you attempt to counsel higher education and work with them about, you know, your product is coming out and what they can expect from you? And do they ever ask you for things or for your program?

Haas: So, are you talking about at the higher education levels?

Hayes: Right.

Haas: Sometimes there is [inaudible].

Hayes: Community College has a nice program, I think here anyway and Cape Fear is the only one that feeds mainly, your students feed into that and then UNCW. So, some of your students stay local. And I just wondered if there was a back and forth there at all.

Haas: Probably not as much as there should be. I mean, we all tend to get in our own little worlds and creating that dialog is difficult. I do have opportunities to talk to people at conferences from East Carolina, Appalachian places where we get a lot of our teachers. And they do ask frequently, what do you need?

Hayes: There are some major suppliers, predictably teachers at ECU is a large large program, right?

Haas: [inaudible]

Hayes: UNCW is really fairly small.

Haas: And they don't have a visual art education degree.

Hayes: Oh really? What do they [inaudible]?

Haas: They have a music education degree, but not a visual art.

Hayes: So, you don't expect any from them? Interesting. So, right today, there is not a pattern coming out-- I thought we could do art education. Is it elementary school only? Interesting.

Haas: Unless that's changed in the last couple of years. I mean when people come to me and they say I really love art, I have an art degree, I'd like to teach. And I say, but you have to be certified. Where do I go? Well, you're going to have to go to Pembroke, you're going to have to go to East Carolina because we don't have that visual art certification here at UNCW.

Hayes: Okay. Well, that's good to know.

Haas: I think it would be great if we did.

Hayes: [inaudible] anyway that [inaudible].

Haas: Like I said, they do have the music education degree.

Hayes: And then theater comes from-- again have to be certified when they're branching into some of the other areas.

Haas: Right.

Hayes: And dance, the same way, right? They would all have to have [inaudible]. So, ECU is a large

supplier. Who are other big--

Haas: Appalachian is another huge supplier, we get a lot from App.

Hayes: Appalachian is another.

Haas: But we get a lot from out of state as well.

Hayes: Right. People that want to move here. Now if they came from out of state they would have to somehow make sure that their certification in the state works.

Haas: And we have reciprocity with several states. So, there are ways that we can make that work if they have that degree.

Hayes: I wanted to just end on your sense of where do you think the next shifts or will there be big shifts in visual art education in the schools are going. I mean, computer is one that I can think about. I mean, how are you going to use the computer as a growing artistic tool? Are you trying to fit that in somewhere?

Haas: Oh, yes, definitely. I was in the classroom eight years ago at Laney. My students used the computer everyday. They worked on-- we had cameras, we had scanners, we would take programs, they would print things out, they'd go out and take photographs. I mean, it was another tool. So technology is really just another tool.

Hayes: But are some of them thinking of-- I was thinking of computer generated art?

Haas: Sure, a lot did. A lot had been doing that.

Hayes: Okay, so you do have that component.

Haas: Yes.

Hayes: Okay. Photography you'd mentioned. Has it switched primarily to digital?

Haas: We have a couple of dark rooms still, in the county. The students love the darkrooms.

Hayes: [inaudible]

Haas: Yes, that's one of their favorite things. I really feel like, and this is just-- I feel this way and it is hopeful, but when we were talking earlier about the studio process of learning, where you have

teacher as facilitator as opposed to standing up and simply spouting knowledge. Kids today don't buy into that model.

Hayes: The second model.

Haas: The second model. They don't--

Hayes: In any discipline.

Haas: In any discipline. It's boring, it's not interesting.

Hayes: And I'm not sure that the other disciplines are using that model. We're kind of talking about old [inaudible].

Haas: Old school, yes. Because I know we have really, like in the math curriculum, we're heavy into manipulatives. You know, that's all changed.

Hayes: Field trips are big in some disciplines.

Haas: Sure.

Hayes: So, we're not saying that they are. But you've been there in the visual arts forever, right?

Haas: Right. But I think the studio model of teaching in the visual arts is captivating to students. It is captivating. I really see that that's going to be a wave of the future. It's already happening where teachers come in and they give out some information. The students get into groups and work or they're working independently. The teacher is facilitator, where you're going around and guiding students through their projects or whatever they're doing, guided learning. You come back together and you critique, which is what we do in the art world, talk about how things are going, how you might make improvements. I think that's the big hope. I think that's a great way of teaching. And I see it happening in other areas. You know, you look back at the visual arts and we've been doing that forever. That's how we operate.

Hayes: You mentioned the group component. Is there much of that in the visual arts, because in the real world of art, it can be a very isolating. You know, it's your product and you against the world kind of mind set? Have you found success in any kind of group process?

Haas: There are several things that you could do in group work so to speak. We do some of that, we

do chalk art kinds of things.

Hayes: That's a nice program. When you have the competition...

Haas: Yes, it's so much fun. That's a really unique experience because you're having to work cooperatively.

Hayes: You have in your office here, a very nice office here, collecting some art, you said for a competition you might tell us about. So there are competitions. Are the teachers [inaudible] real world of exhibits and competitions?

Haas: They do. There are so many opportunities, particularly in this community. I probably get three to four calls a week of some local agency that is doing something.

Hayes: [inaudible]

Haas: Right. And...

Hayes: And music or in drama or [inaudible].

Haas: Right. And so teachers obviously cannot participate in every one of those. But it kind of naturally fits in. They would send artwork out to community exhibits. It's huge, people have no idea how much is out there.

Hayes: I think the one-- I think it's out at the mall isn't it?

Haas: Yes.

Hayes: With all the high schools. That is a great show.

Haas: We'll have elementary one week and then the next week is secondary, middle and high.

Hayes: That is just a great show. And the quality, I think people are just amazed at the...

Haas: And then we have other opportunities. Lots of our teachers take their students to regional competitions or national competitions or state.

Hayes: These are actual competitions for K through-- is this mainly at the high school level?

Haas: Mostly at the middle and high.

Hayes: So, these are actual competitions, just like a writing competition or a math test and so forth?

Haas: Absolutely. Scholastic Competitions, which you may have heard of, anyway, that's a national competition. There's a regional one that's held at Barton College every year and our high school and middle school folks bring home the medals. They do a great job.

Hayes: So, these are ones where you would actually take you work and they hire a judge to come out and judge it. And so they don't know anybody, so it's just there judgment of good work.

Haas: Right. So high quality work going on.

Hayes: Well, that's interesting. Do you have some where they also submit slides or digital images it you can't always take your work?

Haas: We do have some of those. We do have some of those, really at the high school level.

Hayes: That's great.

Haas: But there's a lot going on. The artwork that's in my office right now, there's pieces from every art teacher in New Hanover County.

Hayes: And how many art teachers would there be?

Haas: There are, let's see, visual art, I'd say roughly 45.

Hayes: Wow, that's good. That's really good.

Haas: We have about 103 arts education teachers in the entire county. That includes everything.

Hayes: Everything. That is great.

Haas: But this is called the Superintendent's Choice Art Award. And the superintendent will-- I'll put all these things out and then I'll leave and he will pick his choices and then he picks one from the K-2 level, one from the 3rd through 5th grade, picks a middle school and then he picks a high school piece.

Hayes: But they've already been kind of prescreened and try to be some of the best of each school.

Haas: Right. The teacher...

Hayes: [inaudible]

Haas: [inaudible] Right. And the teachers make some choices and [inaudible].

Hayes: How many students are in the New Hanover County School system?

Haas: Thousands and thousands and thousands. [inaudible] And then he picks his favorites and we send them to get them framed and have a little plaque made. We have a breakfast and he invites the student and their parents and their art teacher and the principal.

Hayes: And are those pictures retained?

Haas: He keeps them here for a year and then they go back to the student.

Hayes: Well, isn't that great?

Haas: It is great. It is such a wonderful--

Hayes: And there are also clubs, right?

Haas: Tons of art clubs.

Hayes: And these could be of any level and these are just like extra support and things to help the supplies and we know supplies are always a challenge in the visual arts--

Haas: They are always a challenge because they are so expensive. But the clubs generally don't generate money. We try. I really dislike fundraising. I know that sometimes we have to do it, but if we can find the money, we're going to buy the supplies. We don't want kids out raising money for crayons and things.

Hayes: So supplies are considered as part of the normal cost.

Haas: Right. The supplies are provided for the students that take the art classes.

Hayes: So, the clubs are popular and fun.

Haas: Very popular.

Hayes: These are like after school and weekend.

Haas: Yes. A couple of our high schools have national art honor society clubs, where student who have certain grade point averages in the arts can join this organization.

Hayes: Do you see an empathetic cross over in the sub divisions? In other words are art students and music students are they naturally friendly with each other or is there more of a division than we might assume between those?

Haas: There's some. I mean, I think that there's always that little bit of competition there. I know as an art teacher at Laney there was a student who was a remarkable visual art student and he also had a wonderful voice. And so here he is a senior in high school and is he going to sign up for the advanced art or the advanced music. So, instead of cutting him in half, he participated in the course during the class time and then he would come in during my planning period and work on his art.

Hayes: Not uncommon if you're arts interested, you may [inaudible].

Haas: We have lots of students that do many things and do them well.

Hayes: Well, listen, thank you very much. I think we really got an interesting perspective on visual arts in the schools.

Haas: I'll tell you, I probably have the best job in the whole entire world, but don't tell anybody.

Hayes: We'll just put it out on the internet.

Haas: Just put it out on the internet.

Hayes: Thanks again.

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