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Implementing Arts Integrated Lessons Through Auto-Ethnography to Improve Teacher

Collaboration

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Abstract

By utilizing the auto-ethnographical approach to writing in the creatively structured format of an arts-integrated exercise that is project-based, this study analyzes qualitative responses made by one administrator and three in-service teachers. By retroactively highlighting students' epiphanies of musical memories (see Appendix D) while also integrating Common-Core and State Standards into its structural design, it produced an activity that was extremely challenging for fifth-grade students but also may hold potential for growth in writing skills and self-knowledge especially as it relates to the practice of teacher self-study. This approach may be utilized in classrooms in the future, but any integration into the curriculum or in professional teaching collaboration groups must be actively engaged by both instructors and students alike. Sociological concepts like race, class, culture etc. can be introduced earlier into writing lessons in public school K-8 curriculum, but must be systematically integrated to achieve maximum pedagogical and collaborative impact.

Keywords: auto-ethnography; collaboration; arts-integration; retroactive writing; common-core curriculum; sociological; epiphanies;

Introduction and Background

As arts and music programs are practically non-existent or becoming increasingly rare in public school classrooms, students and their teachers need to be exposed to culturally relevant and communicative forms of human interaction and exposition to increase intra-relational knowledge which can promote collaborative success for both students and teachers. Because of the controversial nature of the ongoing debate between single-subject and all integrated coursework in public school curricula, this research project will highlight significant ways in which teachers with little to no training in the arts can hope to impact students effectively as well as develop collaborative relationships with other teachers and administrators through the explicit use of auto-ethnography.

Auto-ethnography combines characteristics of both autobiography and ethnography which postulates that the complex phenomenon of writing is a way of knowing. How we value the world cannot be reduced to merely looking at it from a distance, but must be pursued from the vantage point of the Self. It is not an easy or comfortable experience for many especially those who work in such a highly politicized and socially structured environment like public school. Children and younger students tend to be much more open-minded about incorporating the personal and subjective into various forms of expression. That is all-the-more reason why this type of activity should be pursued by any institution of education if it hopes to attain the lofty goals that it aspires to. Educators, administrators, and students can hope to reach the surrounding communities in which they serve by utilizing introspective and insightful forms of qualitative inquiry-based writings. Auto-Ethnography is a vulnerable, evocative and self-reflective form of

writing that has as one of its many goals to bridge the ‘gap’ between the personal and the subjective to broader social, cultural and political issues. Stemming from the Greek root words ethnos (i.e. culture) and –graphy (study or writing of), the term auto is directly related to the psychological concept of ‘I’ and ego-formation. This complex process deeply affects the professional relationships between educators and administrators and can be useful in providing the necessary interpersonal skills required by today’s multi-faceted challenges in public education.

Research conducted in this field can contribute to professional teaching goals in that becoming a credentialed multiple-subject instructor requires as much real world knowledge as possible in all relevant subjects, not limited to any one methodology or academic viewpoint. Auto-Ethnography provides the author and his audience with the freedom of reflexivity, a metaphorical “hall of mirrors” (Diamond, 2016, p. 6) by which we can attempt to grasp the truth of the bipolarity of our personal and private selves. This may allow for potential in the development of authentic pedagogy which is critical in increasing potential ‘positive’ interactions between and among the different social groups under study as they continually narrate and revise their own stories and enhance their definition of “community borders” (Achinstein, 2002, p.421) in the process. This senior Capstone project seeks answers to the following questions.

Primary Research Question:

How does implementing arts integrated lessons through auto-ethnography improve teacher collaboration?

Secondary or Related Research Questions

1. What is auto-ethnography? What do the California state standards and Common Core standards say about the integration of visual arts and performing arts for elementary school students? How has the Auto-Ethnographic approach been applied to integrate visual arts and performing arts in the classrooms in the past decade?

2. What does research say about how Auto-Ethnographic processes apply to arts integration to improve teacher collaboration across the schools? Is the approach effective? If so, how?

3. Are there any arts integrated lessons using of auto-ethnography being implemented in the schools in the Monterey Bay area? If so, how do schools implement them? To certain extent, how do they forge collaboration among pre-service and in-service teachers and administrators in the schools?

4. What could schools do to improve teacher collaboration by integrating visual and performing arts using auto-ethnography, but within the context of the California standards of visual and performing arts and the Common Core standards?

5. What could teachers do to integrate arts lessons by using auto-ethnography as a means to maximize students' learning and at the same time still maintain teacher collaboration? What does this approach imply for future pre-service and in-service teachers as well as administrators?"

Literature Review

The vitality of a liberating education is fundamentally connected to the lived experiences of teachers, students, and administrators and communicated expressively through the arts. It becomes even more important that the groups under study come to a better awareness of themselves as co-creators of the knowledge that they seek. In this next section, we will explore research that links auto-ethnographical approaches to study the culture of teaching and student scholarship while also looking at some of the reasons why this approach may be confusing for fifth grade public school students and overly complex.

Working with teachers, administrators and students synthesizing relevant research around the subject of arts integration and collaborative writing processes will engender not only better students but better teachers and administrators. Scholars in this field have paid much more strict attention and time in recognizing that different kinds of people possess different assumptions about the about the world-a multitude of ways of speaking, writing, valuing and believing.

Expanding our knowledge base on how teachers can work together better to produce more arts integrated lesson planning and thereby increase the amount of liberally educated students via the auto-ethnographical processes should be of central concern to the affected groups under study.

Auto-ethnographers recognize the innumerable ways personal experience influences the research process. Challenging our assumptions and attitudes is one of the main tenets of this approach.

Working as a teacher with other teachers can be extremely stressful and complicated especially on an interpersonal level. Much of the tension and conflict surrounding forming what we may call a teaching community is directly related to how much an organizational group like teachers and administrators may share commonly held beliefs about teaching philosophy, styles of lesson presentation and emphasis, as well as the socially reinforced and nuanced distinction between the individual and the community. In short, auto-ethnographers want to grapple with those assumptions (by de-constructing them) that we take for granted in the hopes of gaining new insight into the social realities that exist while also confronting the research process itself.

Retroactive and exploratory forms of writing, using hindsight, can be very rewarding for those teachers who practice “active engagement in conflict” (Achninstein, 2002, p. 422) in the struggle for authentic academic rigor which can be fruitfully adapted to most organizational learning structures and any unspoken practices contained therein. Precisely because this approach challenges our attitudes and assumptions about the role of the Self in relation to the culture of teaching it can provide insights not explored in any other way. Current auto-ethnographical research highlights the importance and meaningfulness that we may attach to any ‘art’ of teaching that naturally comes from the dialogical interaction that we commonly forget to include in the analysis of our education as teachers. It is no surprise that the great truths behind the practice and philosophy of teaching is interconnected with epiphanies that have their genesis

in lived experience. “I find that my dearest memories come from when I have been in dialogue with my teachers and students” (Vasconcelos, 2011, p. 415).

And yet, this dialogue also happens to occur within the individual simultaneously while writing (and reflecting on what and how subjects have been written) and sharing those insights. Strategies that incorporate the best of introspective/retroactively inspired writing as a means of transformation and team-building can be just as useful in those first couple of anxiety producing years of professional teaching as they may further on down the professional teaching career path. Auto-ethnographers view the writing process itself as form of personal therapy.

Traditional theories regarding the acquisition, maintenance and exercise of organizational power “often do not account for the everyday lived experiences of those inside the organization” (Achinstein, 2002, p. 423). This active engagement focuses on the personal, the emotional and the relational as a centerpiece for study counteracting the deep rooted historical trend in the empirical sciences which requires objectivity at all costs. Auto-ethnography itself challenges our pre-conceptions about what is ‘science’ and the relationship between the individual and society. The social distance between the researched and the researcher is radically challenged making the entire activity a lesson on understanding processes and not the products of those power relations. It also helps us to understand more personally the complex array of interactions that form the basis of our psycho-social evolution. How we manage, both consciously and subconsciously, our personal and private selves can form excellent writing prompts while also helping to construct sociological analyses of our ever-evolving interrelations with other social groups. This on-going process of deep reflection/analysis and the subsequent production of multi-layered accounting of personal experiences, thoughts, and interpersonal relations expressed primarily through the

medium of written language, has extreme and vital importance and translates well across other so-called 'separate' disciplines and micro-political climates.

By utilizing the wealth (breadth and depth) of relevant cultural and personal history and biographical information from students, teachers and administrators they can better hope to reach impacted communities of those very same diverse populations in which they serve and live. Because the potential for individual expression and profound personal insight is so great, sharing that knowledge within a community of learners is vital to this project as it can have lasting effect on individual students and communities of individuals not typically represented by public school administrative integration efforts and current Standardized Assessment practices. These efforts may produce a classroom culture that not only is receptive to the representation of the 'Other' but also expressive in its transformative capabilities by trying to be "... more self-consciously reflexive in my writing and by accepting the inevitable partiality and constructed-ness of all writing" (Diamond, 2016, p. 5).

Writing helps to distinguish between our different internal and external voices. It also has as foundational to its intention the development of written language as action-oriented and charged with emotional content that can have universal appeal and lasting significance. Literature as an art form is rarely if ever combined, at least within the context of current public K-12 curricula, with the other visual and performing arts when it is segregated within the curricular framework of public education. By producing students that can process and communicate complicated social and emotional issues without fear of violating rules, norms, and mores, creating and co-creating narratives help to better train lifelong learners to self-regulate by allowing the writer to explore their progression of biographical thought contemporaneously with lesson-planned activities.

This can benefit a teacher's education by counteracting, through ownership of creatively writing through one's own teacher educational issues, "that somewhat paradoxical feeling of being forgotten about, and under the control of others" (Hayler, 2011, p.5).

Some dynamic ways to achieve this is by reflective writing (which can take the form of personal journaling, expressive poetry, and developing creative group assessments etc.) which can be incorporated into other Visual/Performing Arts and Common Core Standards. By utilizing an integrated approach to a public education, teachers and educators will be better suited to 'mold' leaders and learners within their own academic/professional careers and respective classrooms, neighborhoods and communities by interrogating their own professional identity and "articulate their own selfhood" (Hayler, 2011, p.1). Many lesson plans and curriculum guidelines suffer in the K-12 classroom because of the apparent lack of personally relatable material which do not "help us to gain some purchase on our constructive processes." (Diamond, 2016, p. 8) In as much as the content may be there, many times students and teachers are left with shallow and unenthusiastic attempts at processing mere cookie-cutter lessons that produce 'insights' without any real heart or any personally relatable meaning.

Many students and teachers would benefit tremendously by allowing inquiry-based write-ups to be the centerpiece by which other lessons across many subjects can be formatted and executed. Putting authority back into the students' capable hands not only promotes intellectual rigor but helps to create a culture of community that breaks boundaries of just what an English Language Arts lesson (or I would argue any other kind of lesson) can be. Freedom of expression and choice can be creatively coupled with strict criteria for mastery of skill which is a pre-requisite to success in Common Core and State Standards testing. Authentic collaborators will not be considered passive recipients of knowledge. Self-narrative writing practices can be

fruitful in attempting to merge Self (“I”) and social knowledge (“We”) together by giving students, teachers and administrators the tools by which they can “take possession of their learning as one of the steps by which they can take possession of their lives” (Hayler, 2011, p. 3)

By looking at the three key variables of Auto-Ethnography, Teacher Collaboration, and Arts Integration the reader of this study will start to wonder if any of what is explored in this project isn’t already being done within the context of English Language Arts development within the classroom now as “...the arts have undergone a slow transformation from being the fun free-time coloring activity to an essential subject with significant benefits” (LaJevic, 2013, p. 2). What this project would eventually entail, the exciting part for me, is the process of the transfer of that research and development over to pre-service and in-service teachers. We, in our vision of great teaching practices, embrace the profundity of learning as a primary biological, social and meta-physical need that necessitates that, rather than settling into a culture of classroom conformity and unexpressive professional mediocrity, we continually share the wonder and amazement that we bring to the classroom every day.

This is fundamentally a reciprocal pattern of experiential exchange that expresses itself most readily in what has been labeled to be non-traditional or alternative forms of education. Out of all the research material within the scope of this project this has been the major counterargument for such an approach. The element of time to implement scientifically controversial methods into an already overloaded schedule and the amount of abstract/critical thought required for fifth graders to work with the auto-ethnographical orientation towards writing (i.e. the ‘unpacking’ or deconstruction of mental constructs). Many common textbook reading exercises use the technique of answering questions based on the reading to test comprehension, but these methods

do not “provoke or demonstrate critical thinking or learned arts knowledge” (LaJevic, 2013, p.3) which is a goal of all Common Core designed planning and assessment criteria.

What can be educationally fruitful and innovative in terms of future research is how through creative arts-integrated lesson planning teachers, by studying their own perspectives, stories and histories, teachers can become better suited to ‘reach out’ to their own community of teachers by forming professional study groups that boldly intend to draw as their guiding inspiration the development of their teaching relationships amongst themselves. These social action groups then may have extended social power and cultural influence over their own academic curricula and direction of pedagogy that does not intend to dismantle the apparatus of public education but merely to re-envision it from the inside out. This re-alignment and adjustment has as its very center the attainment of awareness and mindfulness of the educational endeavor as a movement from the experiencer because “none of us are solely defined by our identities as teachers, and our identities as teachers is not solely defined by us” (Coia L., & Taylor M., 2009, p. 3).

All this does not happen unless we can ‘see’ ourselves and continually reflect and expand on our day-to-day triumphs and failures through a mutually concerned and effective support group (what I call action writing groups) that has experienced the ‘Other’. Redefining the nature of the relationship between teacher and student as well as teacher to teacher holds great potential for being better equipped to meet the needs of the publics’ demand for a higher quality education as we “maintain our identity in relation to others” (Coia, & Taylor, 2009, p. 3).

Methods and Procedures

Liberating students, teachers and administrators from paradigms of knowledge that have historically dominated the cultural landscape of teaching, auto-ethnographical writing approaches may be useful for professionals feeling ‘burnout’ and for those questioning their own

status and position within the overall framework of the school when viewed as a social system in dire need of repair and re-examination. In the next section, we will discuss the specifics surrounding the methodological design of the of this qualitative inquiry and responses from participants. The nature of the planning of content and modes of written expression is crucial in developing academic validity to all auto-ethnographical enterprises. It provides the basis by which we can hope to measure the data and attempts to reveal, through this process of biographical introspection, the objectives of the study.

Going about the process of developing the primary and secondary questions involved in this research project entailed that I personally and actively consider the implications of such an endeavor while also paying strict attention to whom I would be studying. Basic qualitative research guidelines necessitated that I develop questions (See Appendices A through C) that would elicit responses in direct relation to the primary and secondary questions. This was daunting at first, but as I followed the methodological outline it became much more clear once the first few steps had been taken. The process that I envisioned would be to conduct an initial anonymous survey (See Appendix A) in an interview form of potential respondents (i.e. two teachers and one administrator) to get an idea of their attitudes and perceptions regarding auto-ethnography, arts-integration strategies, and teacher collaboration. This occurred in the first week of October and would eventually take up space within the following week to implement the next phase of the process. These answers would then go on to help me refine and develop the ‘in-depth’ interview (see Appendix B) of two teachers and one administrator providing a more complex source of data by which to base the research. This interview would then proceed to the running of a lesson plan in a fifth- grade classroom which was designed for the sole purpose of

eliciting retrospective and selective personal events or stories (in this case study involving the medium of music as an art form) which incorporated an auto-ethnographical exercise that combined Common Core and California Visual and Performing Arts standards (see Appendix D).

Personal observations, field notes, and interview responses from this activity would then form the basis for reflection and analysis for the Results and Findings section of the paper which was conducted on the first, second and third week of October. The basic premise being that as a participant-observer I would have much more of a detailed description of the setting, personalities, and practices of writing as an art form acted out within the classroom than merely as an outside observer. I would necessarily have much more of a stake in my own personal evolution as an educator as well because of this tested anthropological and sociological strategy. A follow-up questionnaire (See Appendix C) could then be administered to the participating classroom teacher that was involved in the implementation of the lesson thereby creating a co-constructed awareness of the challenges and benefits of auto-ethnography in an elementary school setting in a very basic, yet somehow for me at least, a very profound way. It also provided some ‘distance’ from the event that is auto-ethnographically critical. Common teacher and administrator perceptions of such proposed changes in lesson presentation of writing as an exploration process, rather than a regurgitation of fact, can affect two main groups: The professional development and teacher collaboration paradigm and Arts-integrated lesson planning as it relates to Common Core teaching necessities. Appendix F provides a few samples of the ‘Musical Memories’ exercise from the students themselves, which in accordance to Common Core assessment criteria, is the finalized product. Because of the limitations placed upon this research project and for the participants to maintain anonymity, participants will be

labeled X, Y, and Z. The responses to the initial survey, 'in-depth' interview and the follow-up questionnaire will be discussed in the next section.

Results, Findings and Discussion

One of the teachers (Teacher Z) was kind enough to correspond with me promptly and allow me the freedom to run an auto-ethnographical exercise, that in hindsight, is barely scratching the surface of what could lie ahead for the effective implementation of self-reflective and retroactive writing practices for elementary students, as well as meaningful teacher collaboration efforts. The other two teacher participants did not respond to the 'in-depth' interview and the follow-up questionnaire. Nor was I able to run the 'Musical Memories' lesson planned activity (See appendix D) in their classrooms. What was gathered though, is useful in the examination of some of the general patterns of concerns and overarching themes outlined in the primary and secondary questions that will be the basis for the next section which analyzes critically, qualitative responses from those same participants.

What emerged through the interview process and classroom participant observation can be described as an inter-relational exploration of a rather abstract form of inquiry that may hold potential for creating modes of instruction that produce artful thinking and writing. Artful thinking about writing and auto-ethnographical study place an emphasis on questioning, reasoning, and explanation of curriculum topics critical to success in both Common-core and state visual and performing arts standards.

1. What is auto-ethnography? What do the California state standards and Common Core standards say about the integration of visual arts and performing arts for elementary school students? How has the Auto-Ethnographic approach been applied to integrate visual arts and performing arts in the classrooms in the past decade?

In answering the question of just what auto-ethnography is, it remains relatively obscure for teachers. One participant responded "...without googling it I have no idea what (it) is." (Teacher Z, Personal communication, October 20 2016.) Even in academia, it has multiple definitions and is considered controversial in its approach to standard forms of conventional writing and presenting ethnography. The effectiveness of all auto-ethnographical research lies in the significance attributed to its ethnographical methodology, cultural significance and meaning(s) attached to the researcher, and its relation to broader political, cultural, and social issues. The decentralization of the personal, relegated to the periphery of formal scientific analysis, does little to account for the almost infinite amount of influence our own attitudes and assumptions play in constructing complex social identities. Auto-ethnography de-constructs those thought processes crystallizing in writing and our attitude towards writing itself. Incorporation of the Self into observational styles of social science, in this project a self-narrative writing activity, cuts deep into the methodological and scientific imperative of complete objectivity prized by many sciences.

2. What does research say about how Auto-Ethnographic processes apply to arts integration to improve teacher collaboration across the schools? Is the approach effective? If so, how?

Part of the effectiveness of the implementation of the 'Musical Memories' activity (See Appendix D) was its newness and challenging nature to both student and teacher. California visual and performing arts and Common-core standards require creativity and critical thinking on a level that can be enhanced and amplified by arts-integration strategies which leverage memory

and address various student learning needs. These strategies necessitate collaboration and integration which can bring the Common core lesson plans to life. When asked if there was an awareness of auto-ethnography as an approach to writing, all students participants didn't have the first clue as to what it is or what it means. It's intention and design apparatus being initially vague (although the amount of excitement was palpable in the classroom) the discussions and activities that evolved with the participants helped to slowly de-mystify the approach by allowing students to constructively engage in group discussion of the topic with some very carefully selected prompts and explanations by the facilitator of the exercise (i.e. myself).

Very little attention has been paid in the past decade to integrate English Language Arts curriculum and auto-ethnographical approaches to writing about fine arts products and critical thinking based processes. Some efforts have been made to utilize collaborative writing exercises (i.e. group writing) within the context of English Language Arts and Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics but is not of an auto-ethnographical or fine arts (visual and performing) orientation. However, it belies the fact that effective modern public school teachers are constantly having to be think, plan, and create lessons outside the box to bring the Common Core Standards to full effect in the classroom.

Future development in planning could incorporate student input in design and focus, as well as using technology and hands-on material (outside of paper, a writing implement, and a brain) to assist in a "multi-modal" (Teacher X, Personal communication, October 11 2016) presentation. When asked in the follow-up survey (See Appendix C) if incorporation of this methodology would be pursued the participant responded "I think I will, as it seems to be a fun yet rigorous project for the kids. Very interesting." (Teacher Z, Personal communication, October 20 2016).

Teacher collaboration can be enhanced productively by arts-integration and auto-ethnographical writing practices in the elementary school classroom. It does so by helping to create an environment by which the student and the teacher (as well as teacher to teacher) start to creatively respond to each other's real-world experience through sociological introspection and consequent dialogue. The form of assessment is also radically challenged for both students and teachers as "...it is my biggest complaint about the Common-Core. I am still undecided about the assessment process" (Teacher Z, Personal Communication, October 20 2016). It helps teachers to begin to form a reflexive definition of themselves, an ontology of teaching, that acknowledges personal and professional aspects of personality and practice. Without the second component of this interaction, the dialogical component, the tremendous potential insights gained of our peers and colleagues within the profession teaching community would be lost.

3. Are there any arts integrated lessons using of auto-ethnography being implemented in the schools in the Monterey Bay area? If so, how do schools implement them? To certain extent, how do they forge collaboration among pre-service and in-service teachers and administrators in the schools?

Arts integrated lesson planning through auto-ethnography is not being incorporated within public school curriculum within the Monterey Bay area. It can however, forge collaboration among pre-service and in-service teachers as the current model on collaboration requires that "we work together to create, share and assess interesting and pertinent lessons and units" (Teacher Z, Personal communication, October 20 2016) that help to shape the educational experiences of the students, teachers, and administrators. This unique approach to writing about the arts compels the groups under study to go deeper in their analysis of topics brought up in possible units of study.

At the end of the activity most of the students and the participant teacher seemed favorable to the writing prompt as one example of what could be part of a larger auto-ethnographical project that required students to “think and write in a novel way” (Teacher Z, Personal communication, October 20 2016). Incorporating broader social issues (like challenging our notions of teacher identity and subsequent roles within professional collaboration groups) as well as visual and performing arts foci over time, in alignment with integrated auto-ethnographical learning, is one of the key features of this style of pedagogy. Professional relationships may benefit from increased introspection on shared values and beliefs that ultimately create an environment where students, administrators, and teachers can feel “safe and welcome” (Teacher X, Personal communication, October 11 2016) to share their insights into the evolution of their thinking processes. This type of environment could produce a “strong, close relationship with administration” (Teacher Z, Personal communication, October 20 2016) that maintains effective teaching collaboration practices as well arts-integrated curriculum development potential.

4. What could schools do to improve teacher collaboration by integrating visual and performing arts using auto-ethnography, but within the context of the California standards of visual and performing arts and the Common Core standards?

California state standards and Common Core standards actively promote the integration of visual and performing arts for elementary school students. Common Core objectives require that we move “towards a depth of knowledge model rather than a breadth of knowledge idea and I like that we are now valuing critical and strategic thinking along with problem solving” (Teacher Z, Personal communication, October 20 2016). The necessities of district approval for allocated monies which dictate curriculum choice and available materials have generated a “complete decimation” (Teacher Z, Personal Communication, October 20 2016) of arts-integrated programs available to in-service teachers. This may be a development of the school administration’s

attempts at furthering their own “particular agenda” (Teacher Z, Personal communication, October 20 2016) that can be actively explored and communicated through the use of writing on the Self. What has developed within schools since is integrating the arts into subject content sporadically but no direct “arts programming” (Teacher Z, Personal communication, October 20 2016) to speak of. Public school teachers have had to write their own arts-integrated curriculum in collaboration with other teachers. Educators with little to no arts training or arts backgrounds radically reduce the quality of arts integrated lessons by effecting the overall “approach and pacing of curriculum” (Teacher Y, Personal communication, October 13 2016).

5. What could teachers do to integrate arts lessons by using auto-ethnography as a means to maximize students’ learning and at the same time still maintain teacher collaboration? What does this approach imply for future pre-service and in-service teachers as well as administrators?”

What this implies for pre-service and in-service teachers is a re-assessment of the value of art in public school and, as a consequence, can begin to look at introspective writing as a mode by which to personalize and create relatable meaning in arts-integrated products or Common-Core processing lessons. In this way, art can hope to genuinely transcend the art as decoration mindset in the classroom. This strategy of incorporating auto-ethnography does not require an extensive arts-integration background making it an effective tool in the “toolbox of skills to reach students of different learning styles” (Teacher Z, Personal communication, October 20 2016) that teachers can use at will and at their own discretion. It does however, require a fundamental awareness of auto-ethnographical principles like the process of selectivity coupled with a rigorous analysis of personal observations and statements to produce educational progression and intra-relational knowledge. It also requires that the implementation of the approach like the ‘Musical Memories’ exercise developed for this research (See Appendix D) use “a prompt that is easily grasped”

(Teacher Z, Personal communication, October 20 2016) to maximize students' learning and maintain teacher collaboration.

Outside of this research project's designed activity, schools in the Monterey Bay area have not incorporated the application of auto-graphical writing and reflection into visual and performing arts in the classrooms. As the needs of the students can change over time, the "motivation for learning is still the same" (Teacher X, Personal communication, October 11 2016) which requires that academic and professional collaborative "tools" (Teacher X, Personal communication, October 11 2016) be re-evaluated as well. Exploring the development of our own thinking and feeling as teachers can be fine-tuned by inter-relational and introspective modes of inquiry. We cannot allow ourselves as educators to be lulled into the complacency of simple textbook teaching. It requires that we constantly grapple with (auto-ethnographical research is but one method) of our multiple identities as teachers and, more importantly the radical nature of the relationships between students and administrators in helping to define the roles acted out by that of a 'good' teacher. Affecting the ways "young humans act and think in a changing world" (Teacher Z, Personal communication, October 20 2016) should be of prime importance for future educators and seasoned veterans of public school teaching.

Problems and Limitations

Many of the requirements for a well-purposed and nuanced research paper necessitate the adherence to a strict schedule. Having worked in education and also had a handful of networking possibilities at my disposal before started the process I thought that it would be a matter of a few days (maybe a week or two) to coordinate my personal work and family schedule enough to find time to talk, interview, and run lesson planning with the participants and the respondents to

research related material. Nothing could be further from the truth. I found that it took a few weeks just to get a response from the teachers whom I had given emails to. In the back of my mind I was thinking would this research project get done on time? What if I don't have enough data? Would I have to go back to the drawing board? I got the sense right away that the more time I would spend just gathering the data the better off I would be in analyzing and interpreting it so I set out to just get up and go to the sites on a weekly basis until the required research would be done.

This seemed to pay off dividends because as soon as I had done so, the surveys and interviews just happened and I got the responses I needed to get the ball rolling. In the end, I was only able to interview one administrator and two teachers. One part of the prospectus that I was not able to finalize was the observation of an arts-integrated lesson plan administered by another teacher. That data would have been useful for the write-up in the compare and contrast section (i.e. pro's and cons) but will not be incorporated due to no data available to support the research. Literature Review analysis would then have to provide some answers to the overall effectiveness of auto-ethnography and its place within education and not data from interviews or surveys.

Some other concerns of mine in relation to the research on auto-ethnography, had to do with the approach as being too abstract and not concrete enough to use as a viable subject that elementary school students could grasp especially with regards to the implementation of the Common Core aligned writing plan. Would fifth graders get it? Would I be able to sound like I know what I'm talking about? And even more importantly, will in-service teachers understand and utilize this approach? This was more so at the outset of the project because the more I researched the literature and became more knowledgeable, the more I became compelled after a certain amount of time to complete this work. It was as if it *needed* to be said by *me*. But it was

never about just me. Just me in relation to the perceived dividing line between the student and the teacher. And just as important for future research and development in the self-study of practice between teacher and teacher. In the next portion of this research paper I propose that further implementation of retroactive writing practices can be integrated into public school classrooms but must be designed to be intellectually sound and grounded into the realistic necessities of teaching.

Recommendations

Implementing the auto-ethnographical approach in the fifth-grade classroom was challenging in the sense that students are usually given a lot of guided and prompted instruction within the context of grammar and spelling to formulate their writing. Common-Core standards in the state of California prescribe curriculum that is rigidly structured, taught and assessed. Data-driven teaching is an educational reality that can set up the learning to be less inclusive of a child's personal history, developing social/emotional constructs, and community (i.e. cultural capital). Motivation to continue to write is radically reduced when taken out of the classroom environmental context. Examples could include the 'step-up-2-writing' curriculum which formed the basis for writing instruction design in the classroom I observed. It assesses writing skills methodically and dissects the major components of grammar and any meanings attached to the text. Many of the students' questions in response to the auto-ethnographical exercise at first seemed to display a sense of delayed hesitation and much concern was placed upon whether- or- not this was going to be graded.

What emerged through the dialogue with students was a mutually agreed upon definition of the event as a 'rough draft'. After informing them that it would not be graded and was a 'rough draft' it seemed to ease the tension slightly, but still the introspective style and free-form

generative writing was something I could see they were not entirely comfortable with. One of the major setbacks for this research project was in the presentation of the lesson itself in that it could have been executed much more effectively. Much more time can be placed upon lesson plan design and purpose. Pausing to consider their grade level attempts, I could see how as teachers, the writing processes under the scope of this study would necessarily take much more time to develop and even more time to implement effectively. What was interesting though was that by placing the emphasis of the introspection on popular songs of their choosing they generated deeply personal and varied responses. (see Appendix E) Guided prompts were needed to place the writers within the framework by which they could visualize or imagine experiencing that music for the first time. The setting, time, and social situation that they happened to be embedded in during this first experience of the song or music was the centerpiece by which they could ‘pause and reflect’ on the type of words (as well as quantity of words) that they were using. This is a focal point of auto-ethnographical research because it provides centrality for the learner. Centrality could be defined as the reflective processes by which ethnography becomes auto-ethnography and, if properly aligned with methodological best practices, considered to be academically valid.

Teachers, students, administrators have suffered at the hands of huge reductions in performing and visual arts curriculum despite research that has indicated a definite need for these programs. Common-core standards require a level of abstract and creative thinking practices that can be progressed quite rapidly by arts-integration in the classroom. Collaboration efforts by teachers and administrators have attempted to utilize what limited resources are available to further the goals of Common-Core objectives. It would seem a natural progression that teachers themselves, to foster a greater sense of ownership and direction, use their own writings and

reflections on Self that correspond to their own professional development. In the past decade, ethnic studies and culturally relevant pedagogies have attempted to start this process of building the student's world into the curriculum. When we look at the responses from the participants, no auto-ethnographical approaches have been utilized or considered for curriculum integration or collaboration to achieve this.

Conclusion

Despite the relative anxiety produced by such 'controversial' educational methods, auto-ethnography may have potential to increase collaboration and professional development. Not only does it place educators, students, and administrators in the middle of their own learning experiences and challenge commonly held perceptions about the nature of teaching (and its place within society and culture), it can produce meaningful personal exchange and insightful writing. These changes take on greater significance as we look to administrators and teachers to rise-up to the many challenges of balancing increasing demands on their classrooms. These demands include the incorporation of Common-core and state visual and performing arts standards in challenging new ways. The 'writing as therapy' paradigm can offer teachers and students new methods by which hope, healing, and transformative experiences may occur in public school.

It does so by reclaiming the previously marginalized aspect of the Self, making the personal a central text. The effectiveness of such an auto-ethnographical approach is critically dependent upon personal initiative, creativity, and effective implementation. It forces us to analyze and incorporate ourselves, our true selves, into the trenches of modern schooling in our communities. A consequence of the radical reduction in arts programs over the past few decades requires teachers and administrators to be innovative in their approach to arts integration and professional

collaboration. The effective use of auto-ethnography may provide new modes of inquiry to spark even further personal and social learning.

Weaving arts-integration and auto-ethnographic writing practices changes the culture of teaching precisely because it challenges our perceptions of who we are, what we do, and how and why we should do it. Teachers themselves can develop professionally as they continually evolve and grow with the challenges of effective implementation. Writing can be a revealing process by which we can unravel the complexity of Self and society within the context of public education. Educators must be the resounding voice for their own agenda(s) and the acting conscience of their student's needs. The main idea behind any arts-integration and teacher collaboration practice is that it must be an 'easy-fit' and has to make sense (appeals to a broad spectrum of subject content) to maximize student and teacher affect. Auto-ethnography, because of its challenging nature, can avoid being too obscure in an arts-integrated lesson plan by focusing on "direction/instructions/purpose" (Teacher Z, Personal communication, October 2016) to further the notion that the fine arts, through auto-ethnographic research, can help us better understand the learning experiences we are giving students.

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Appendix A: Initial Questionnaire

- How long have you taught? Longer than 5 years? If longer than 5 years, how long?
- What is your preferred learning style? (Visual, Auditory, Tactile, Kinesthetic etc.)
- Would you be interested in allowing a pre-service teacher observe an Arts-Integrated lesson in your classroom?
- Would you be interested in allowing a CSUMB Liberal Studies Senior run an arts-integrated lesson in your classroom?
- If there was one thing you could do to ‘radically change’ your classroom (environment, structure, schedule, subject-emphasis etc.) what would it be? How would you propose to enact those changes?
- Why did you want to teach or choose teaching as a career? What was your initial motivation? Has it changed since you started teaching? If so, why and how?
- Do you have an ‘arts’ background in your personal education? If not, what concentration or minor?

Appendix B: Interview Questions

- Do you know what Auto-Ethnography is? Would you be willing to help create a lesson plan for your students that would help develop one?
- Do you have any *training* regarding implementation of arts-integrated programming? If so, what? Where and with whom?
- What are your attitudes/perceptions regarding Common Core Standardization and Assessment?
- If you could describe the teacher collaboration process in one sentence, what would it be?
- Do you feel that arts-integrated lesson planning is supported by your administration?
- How would you describe your working relationship with administration in general? With other teachers? Besides the *required* collaboration with other teachers what is being done to help develop students' school experiences to accommodate their particular learning style(s) and remain culturally relevant?
- (To teachers) What would you suggest that your administrative body could do to help further integrating the arts at your school?
- (To Administrators) What would you suggest that your teaching staff do to help further integrating the arts at your school(s)?

Appendix C: Follow-Up

- Will you incorporate the auto-ethnographical method in future arts-integrated lessons? Why or Why not?
- What could be some of the possible benefits of such an approach?
- What could some of the potential pitfalls of such an approach?
- Would you be willing to utilize the auto-ethnographical approach in your professional collaborative relationships? Why or Why not?

Appendix D:

Common Core Aligned Lesson Plan Template

Subject(s): English Language Arts/Visual and Performing Arts

Grade level: Fifth grade

‘Musical Memories’ Auto-Ethnography Lesson

1. Common Core Learning Standard(s) Addressed: Writing Standards 5.3 (Text, Types and Purposes) and 5.4 (Production and Distribution of Writing); Visual and Performing Arts Standard Grade 5: 4.2 (Derive Meaning)
2. Learning Target(s): (What will students know & be able to do as a result of this lesson?)
Students will be able to produce a piece of writing that reflects their awareness of Self as a critical component to the writing process as well as develop a richer understanding of musical signification. This will have an impact on all future writing and the students’ relationship to the process generating culturally relevant work.
3. Relevance/Rationale: (Why are the outcomes of this lesson important in the real world? Why are these outcomes essential for future learning?) For students to connect a musical “work’ with a rich emotional and semantic context in their own lives. Students can then

utilize this method to produce more writing to be collected and incorporated into a larger auto-ethnographical project.

4. Formative Assessment Criteria for Success: (How will you & your students know if they have successfully met the outcomes? What specific criteria will be met in a successful product/process? (What does success on this lesson's outcomes look like?) Students will successfully meet the outcome of this activity by producing a piece of writing that reflects and expands upon the students' own knowledge and experience base. Success will be measured by adherence to the criteria set forth by the standard as well as considering the breadth and depth of responses in relation to group discussion on the topics specific to this lesson. Success can be measured by the *Assessment and Criteria Outline* provided below.

Criteria for Mastery

- Students will be able to produce a piece of auto-ethnographical writing that is grammatically error-free. The writing also displays attempts at integrating personal knowledge of the experience to larger sociological concepts like culture and family and biography through a narrative style of writing. The student's writing should answer each question presented to them in a manner appropriate to grade level writing and communication standards.

5. Activities/Tasks: (What learning experiences will students engage in? How will you use these learning experiences or their student products as formative assessment opportunities?) Formative Assessment opportunities arise from the production of a well-written document as well as participation in group and class discussion.

Sequence of Classroom Activities:

1. Students should take a piece of lined paper and a pencil or pen. Number the page from one to five down the left side. Generate a list of five pieces of music that were important to you last year. Do not worry about what the pieces are, just write down the first five that you can think of. (3mins)
2. Next, choose the piece of music from your list for which you can remember the most vivid experience. Imagine that you are having that experience again. Describe what you can see in front of you, describe what is behind you, describe what is to either side of you. If there are other people there, describe what they are doing and perhaps what they look like. Do not stop to think too closely about what you are writing. Do not let your pen or pencil stop moving. (7mins)
3. Describe how you felt at that moment. What relationship did the music have to that feeling? Did it intensify it? Contradict it? Were the words important? Were you listening to the music? Were you performing? Was the music playing in the background? Were other people paying attention to it? (7mins)
4. How did the event change your relationship to that particular piece of music? To other music? To other people? (5mins)

5. Re-read what you have written. How many words did you write in this time (19 minutes of actual writing)? Pick out the sentence (or two) you like the most of what you've written and underline it. (3mins)
6. Return to the group for a discussion of the exercise (10 mins) Have students volunteer to read their favorite sentences. Discuss the deeper questions about music and context that the exercise brought to the surface; Discuss this process of generating writing in the context of creating a larger auto-ethnographical project.

6. Resources/Materials: (What texts, digital resources, & materials will be used in this lesson?) My own sample of my responses to the questions as a 'model'. Internet may be used to provide appropriate music (examples could include This Land is Your Land by Woody Guthrie and The Star-Spangled Banner for instance) that can be substituted for music chosen by the students as a separate lesson planned activity. (i.e. group listen/generative writing/classroom guided discussion). Paper and pencil for the actual writing.

Appendix E:

Participant Responses

Participant X

Initial Survey Responses:

Q: How long have you taught? Longer than 5 years? If longer than 5 years, how long?

A: "Nineteen years."

Q: What is your preferred learning style? (Visual, Auditory, Tactile, Kinesthetic etc.)

A: "Visual learner. I like to see it first, then I want to practice it."

Q: Would you be interested in allowing a pre-service teacher observe an Arts-Integrated lesson in your classroom?

A: "Yes"

Q: Would you be interested in allowing a CSUMB Liberal Studies Senior run an arts-integrated lesson in your classroom?

A: "Yes."

Q: If there was one thing you could do to 'radically change' your classroom (environment, structure, schedule, subject-emphasis etc.) what would it be? How would you propose to enact those changes?

A: "I would be interested in the innovative use of incorporating technology especially for the second through sixth grade. Instruction in our current teaching models."

Q: Why did you want to teach or choose teaching as a career? What was your initial motivation?

Has it changed since you started teaching? If so, why and how?

A: Fourth grade teacher motivated; safe and welcome; she made it fun and that motivated me Motivation still there but the tools have changed; instruction as "data-driven"; assessment as it

relates to curriculum needs before and after No Child Left Behind; Direct Instruction and Common Core.

Q: Do you have an ‘arts’ background in your personal education? If not, what concentration or minor?

A: No; Social Science

Participant Y:

Initial Survey Responses

Q: How long have you taught? Longer than 5 years? If longer than 5 years, how long?

A: “14 years.”

Q: What is your preferred learning style? (Visual, Auditory, Tactile, Kinesthetic etc.)

A: “Multi-modal. I don’t have as much interest when it is just visual then verbal. I would prefer to see it, then copy it. In high-school I had a real math anxiety.”

Q: Would you be interested in allowing a pre-service teacher observe an Arts-Integrated lesson in your classroom

A: “Yes”

Q: Would you be interested in allowing a CSUMB Liberal Studies Senior run an arts-integrated lesson in your classroom?

A: “Yes”

Q: If there was one thing you could do to ‘radically change’ your classroom (environment, structure, schedule, subject-emphasis etc.) what would it be? How would you propose to enact those changes?

A: “I have an old curriculum...Approach and pacing of program curriculum...Implementation requires that I work through lunch.”

Q: Why did you want to teach or choose teaching as a career? What was your initial motivation?

Has it changed since you started teaching? If so, why and how?

A: “It was an accident. I was an awful student ...degree in sociology at 24 years old. I worked for the Juvenile Probation as an aide for emotionally disturbed students for three years/burnout youth.”

Q: Do you have an ‘arts’ background in your personal education? If not, what concentration or minor?

A: “No arts background; sociology.”

Participant Z:

Initial Survey Responses

How long have you taught? Longer than 5 years? If longer than 5 years, how long?

I have been a certificated teacher for 6 years, this being my 5th year at Kammann.

What is your preferred learning style? (Visual, Auditory, Tactile, Kinesthetic etc.)

MY preferred learning style is mainly ‘Learn by Doing’, so essentially kinesthetic, but it must be preceded by some sort of auditory instruction.

Would you be interested in allowing a pre-service teacher observe an Arts-Integrated lesson in your classroom?

Sure, although in my teaching style, that is a rare beast.

Would you be interested in allowing a CSUMB Liberal Studies Senior run an arts-integrated lesson in your classroom?

Yes.

If there was one thing you could do to ‘radically change’ your classroom (environment, structure, schedule, subject-emphasis etc.) what would it be? How would you propose to enact those changes?

To incur the most positive change would be to take class size down by at least a quarter. The effect on a toward a positive learning environment from 29 kids to 22 is staggering. The answer is simple: dollars should be spent on classroom teachers rather than bloated administration and agenda-driven district mandates.

Why did you want to teach or choose teaching as a career? What was your initial motivation? Has it changed since you started teaching? If so, why and how?

I was in the agriculture industry for 19 years before teaching. Substitute teaching was a ‘fall back’ option I set up for myself years ago, just in case. As luck would have it, I was laid off from an ag position in 2008 and opted to substitute in the district until I was back on my feet. Connections and chance encounters with key individuals prompted a return to school for my teaching credential, and I’ve never looked back. Any motivation I had back then (interim employment, change of scenery, etc.) has since shifted to affecting change in the ways young humans need to act and think in a changing world. Character is a huge part of my curriculum and needs to be a huge part in the lives of our community. I was born and raised in Salinas and I want to make good citizens to help bring change to this town and community.

Do you have an ‘arts’ background in your personal education? If not, what concentration or minor?

My background is almost entirely agriculture-based. I have no arts skill or background.

Participant Z:
Interview Responses

Do you know what Auto-Ethnography is? Would you be willing to help create a lesson plan for your students that would help develop one?

Without Googling it, I have no idea what Auto-Ethnography is. I will look into it.

Do you have any training regarding implementation of arts-integrated programming? If so, what? Where and with whom?

We have had professional development time to help integrate some art into our curriculum, but not arts-integrated programming.

What are your attitudes/perceptions regarding Common Core Standardization and Assessment?

I believe Common Core is more akin to ‘common sense’. We are finally going towards a ‘depth of knowledge’ model rather than a ‘breadth of knowledge’ idea and I like that we are now valuing critical and strategic thinking along with problem solving. However, California still seems to want to do things differently than the nation, which is my biggest complaint with Common Core. I am still undecided on my feelings towards the assessment process.

If you could describe the teacher collaboration process in one sentence, what would it be?

We work together to create, share, and assess interesting and pertinent lessons and units, while developing strategies through data to reach our lower-performing students.

Do you feel that arts-integrated lesson planning is supported by your administration?

Yes, particularly since most of the arts programs have been decimated by the district.

How would you describe your working relationship with administration in general? With other teachers? Besides the *required* collaboration with other teachers what is being done to help develop students' school experiences to accommodate their particular learning style?

I believe I have a strong close, strong relationship with my school administration, but a rather distant relationship with district admin. I really don't believe they have our best interest at the forefront, but rather a particular agenda that they are wanting to further. In addition to required collaboration, we have opportunities for staff and professional development that add to our 'toolbox' of skills to reach students of differing learning styles.

What would you suggest that your administrative body could do to help further integrating the arts at your school?

Pressure the district and board members, perhaps be more public (through social media and the press) of the lack of arts in our curriculum. They can't really do anything on their own without district ok.

How can we assess the effectiveness of arts integrated lesson planning?

I think written feedback can be the best assessment, especially for elementary kids.

Participant Z:

Follow-up

Will you incorporate the auto-ethnographical method in future arts-integrated lessons? Why or Why not?

I think I will, as it seems to be a fun yet rigorous project for the kids. Very interesting.

What could be some of the possible benefits of such an approach?

It certainly gets the kids to think, which is a huge part of the curriculum, oddly enough. The writing aspect is important as well, as they don't get a lot of regular writing practice

What could some of the potential pitfalls of such an approach?

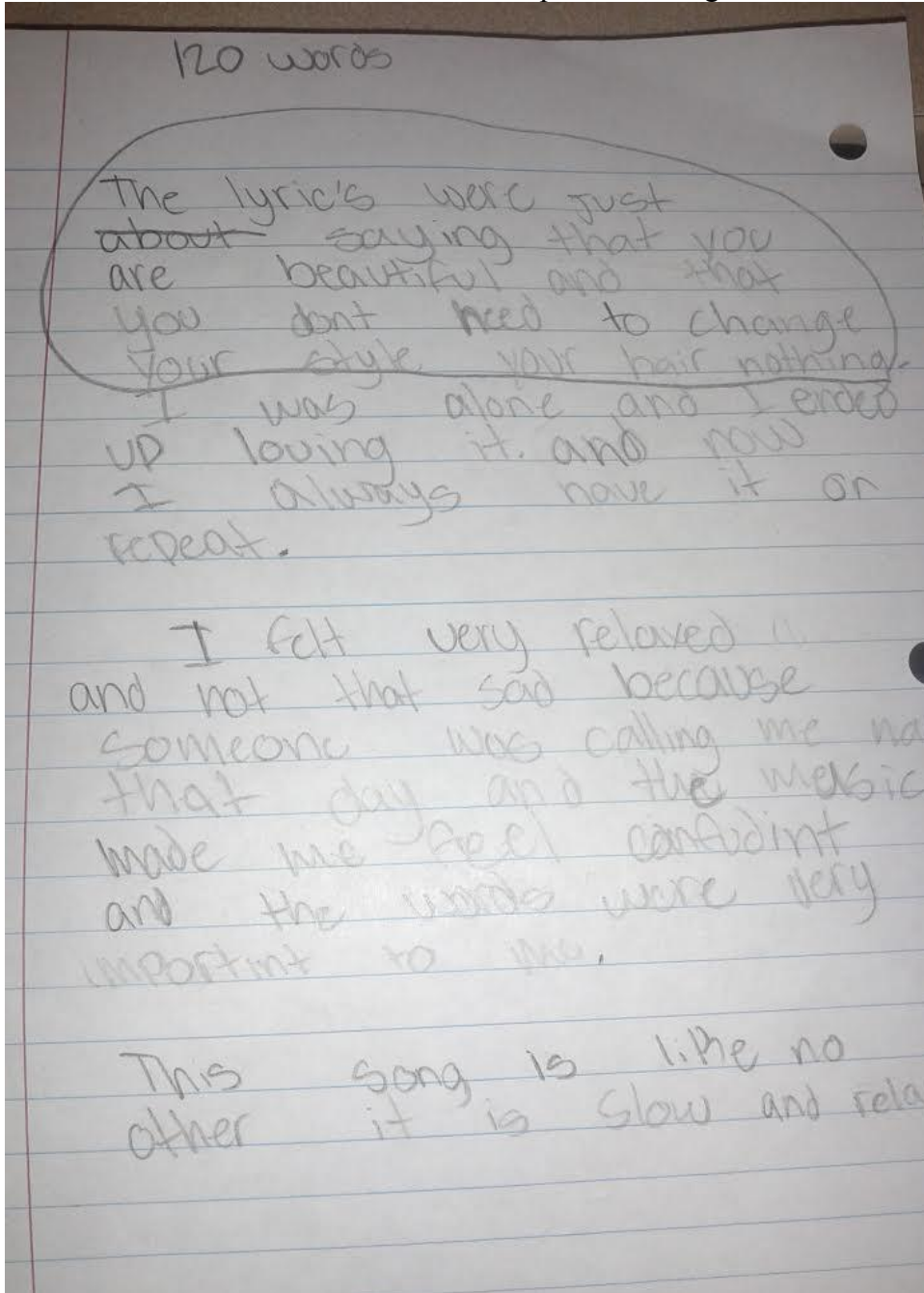
If the prompt is vague or if the kids lack any real-world experience required, it could be a problem. Many kids don't have the background knowledge that may be necessary. I would have to use a prompt that is easily grasped. Also (for this year's class anyway), the quiet part of the

activity would pose a problem, especially if they are unclear on the directions/instructions/purpose.

Would you be willing to utilize the auto-ethnographical approach in your professional collaborative relationships? Why or Why not?

I will be sharing this activity with my grade-level colleagues at our next meeting, as it is a novel approach (to me, anyway) to thinking and writing.

Appendix F:
Student samples of writings



Maritza #22
10-20-16

My favorite songs are: I like country,
I also like a song called Company from
Justin Bieber,
Ariana Grande: Side to side

Country: I need you now

When I heard this song in my room, with
my mom and I was little younger, I liked how
they sang like they sang like a melody and country
at the same time, the lyrics were very nice, and
the instrument was nice in the song. It made
me feel nice like I was in the song.

The song was on the phone, the lyrics
meant like the person was alone. It made
me feel okay, it was a song where you
really feel an emotion, you feel like your
in that song and singing the song yourself.

The song was better than any other
song I heard. It wasn't too much of hip-hop,
but it was no match for any other singer or
song, I liked this song much better.

Maritza #22
10-20-16

My favorite songs are: I like country,
I also like a song called Company from
Justin Bieber,

Ariana Grande: Side to side

Country: I need you know

When I heard this song in my room, with
my mom and I was little younger, I liked how
they sang like they sang like a melody and country
at the same time, the lyrics were very nice, and
the instrument was nice in the song. It made
me feel nice like I was in the song.

The song was on the phone, the lyrics
meant like the person was alone. It made
me feel okay, it was a song where you
really feel any emotion, you feel like your
in that song and singing the song yourself.

The song was better than any other
song I heard. It wasn't too much of hip-hop,
but it was no match for any other singer or
song, I liked this song much better.

Leol.
#17
10/20/16

See you again-Charlie puth
Desert-Dawin

When I first heard that song I was in the car, in the beginning of fourth grade. My mom was driving and my little sister was in the car and we were dropping off my big sister. The song was on the radio it made me wonder what happen to my old friends. It also made me really sad I felt like I was crying. Some other music was funny and really happy, but this song was like no other song it was beatiful to me.

References

Last Name, F. M. (Year). Article Title. *Journal Title*, Pages From - To.

Last Name, F. M. (Year). *Book Title*. City Name: Publisher Name.

Footnotes

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Tables

Table 1

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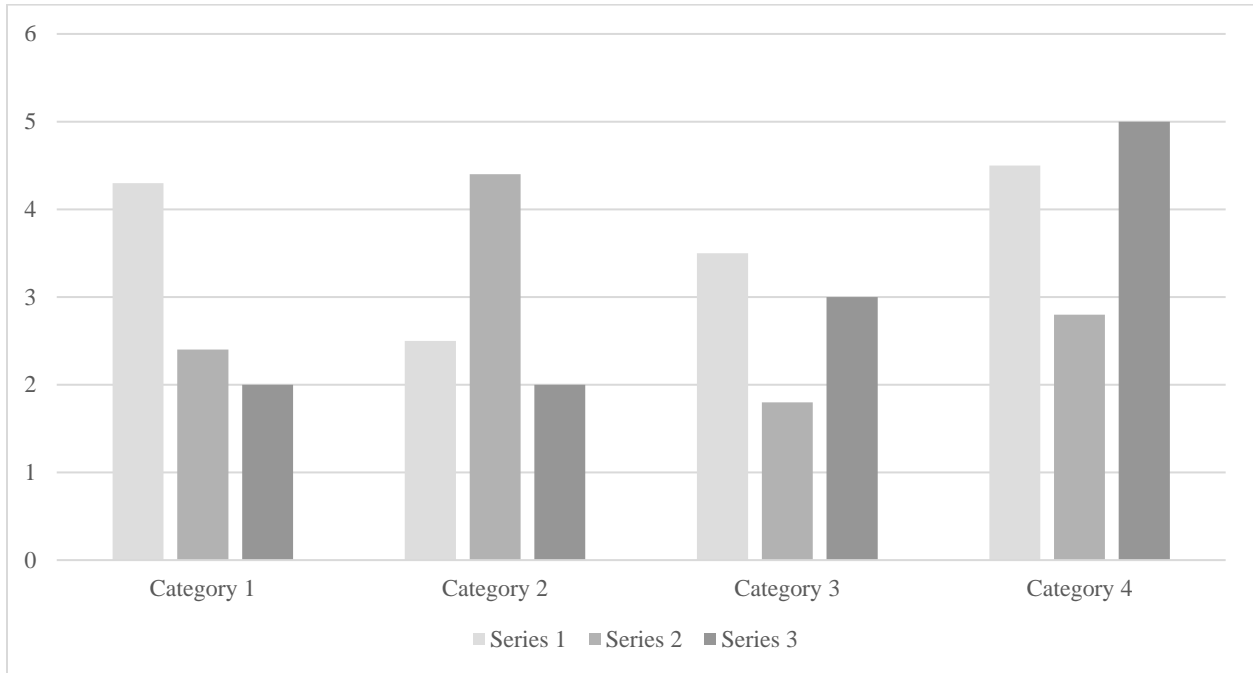


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