

artizein

Arts & Teaching JOURNAL



Stories that **Mattered**

Artizein: Arts and Teaching Journal is an open access, blind, peer-reviewed publication housed at Southern Illinois University Carbondale. The Journal seeks to contribute to the field of visual arts education--and beyond its permeable boundaries to all of the arts--by creating a place for written and/or artistic work.



art (n.) early 13c., “skill as a result of learning or practice,” from Old French art (10c.), from Latin *artem* (nominative *ars*) “work of art; practical skill; a business, craft,” from PIE **ar-ti-* (cognates: Sanscrit *rtih* “manner, mode;” Greek art “just,” *artios* “complete, suitable,” *artizein* “to prepare;” Latin *artus* “joint;” Armenian *annam* “make;” German *art* “manner, mode”), from root **ar-* “fit together, join”



SUBMISSIONS

Artizein: Arts & Teaching Journal welcomes original manuscripts from teachers, researchers, and artists that offer insight into teaching, learning, and inquiring into/with/through the arts. Artizein published articles, artworks, poems, visual essays, book reviews, and digital media (eg. audio and video files);

▲ to deepen perceptions about the creative capacities of all people, and how this ability, that is innate to all, unfolds and develops in a wide array of ways, tempos, and settings,

▲ to inform and engage readers in expansive thinking about what the arts are and can be, and how to teach, transmit, and facilitate their emergence, where it might take place, and how to recognize its impact on those that make and those that experience the arts and their effects,

▲ to expand possibilities for how the arts as inquiry can contribute to the learning and unlearning of ways of being and knowing for just and sustainable societies (communities),

▲ to direct attention to instructional approaches (some new and innovative, others neglected or forgotten) that are currently restricted by an emphasis on normalized arts instruction in public schooling and higher education.

Please visit the website for specific information related to submission guidelines and upcoming volumes.

https://opensiuc.lib.siu.edu/atj/call_for_papers.html

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Table of Contents

Stories that Mattered

- 6 Editorial Foreword**
Barbara Bickel
- 7 Introduction: Stories That Mattered**
Peter London
- 9 Melvin Gets A Passing Grade**
Peter London
- 11 Amelia's Gift**
Danny Mydlack
- 16 Reflections, Relationships & Art Class**
Rochelle St. Martin Pettenati
- 22 Keep On Going...**
Jane Bates
- 28 The Bridge**
Bonnie Berkowitz
- 37 Aesthetic And Pedagogical Compasses: The Self in Motion**
Liora Bresler
- 47 Do Teachers Know This?**
David Pike
- 53 A Story Without End...**
Holly Edwards
- 57 Fashion, Identity And The Muslim-American Narrative**
Shireen Soliman
- 65 The Art Of Storying A Life**
Alexandra Fidyk
- 72 Art: Complete Puzzle Picture For Stories That Mattered**
Peter London

Editorial Foreword

Farewell

Artizein's 2021 Volume VI/Issue 1, entitled *Stories that Mattered*, has been gathered together and edited by **Dr. Peter London**. It marks and honors his retirement from the editorial team while at the same time bringing forward art teacher stories in a conversational style found when sitting around a circle with seasoned artists-teachers. *Artizein: Arts and Teaching Journal* would not be here today without the vision of Dr. London. A vision that began while sitting around a table in 2014 with Drs. Sally Gradle and Barbara Bickel sharing their stories of art making, researching and teaching. The vision for the journal unfolded through their conversations and led to the co-founding and establishing of *Artizein* as a welcoming space for other arts educators, artists and researchers to publish their writing, art and stories, that might otherwise not be seen in the academy and beyond. We are extremely grateful for Dr. London's many contributions to the journal over the years.

Welcome

With each ending comes beginnings and new gifts. *Artizein* is delighted to welcome **Dr. Darlene St. Georges** to the editorial team, joining Drs. Barbara Bickel and Laurel Fredrickson. Dr. St. Georges is an artist and Assistant Professor of Art Education at the University of Lethbridge in Alberta, Canada. She has been on the *Artizein* editorial board since 2019 and guest edited and designed the 2020 issue. She brings her unique creation-research methodology and Indigenous scholarship along with her leadership, editing and design skills, passion and commitment. Dr. St. Georges will undoubtedly assist the journal to advance its approaches to critical, ethical and compassionate editorialship within the academy, as well as aesthetic knowledge sharing—presenting works in expansive, aesthetic and experimental ways.

In the coming years we look forward to building upon the original vision for *Artizein* and expanding a growing community that can investigate and share new learning and knowledge generated in and through and about arts and education, in all its multiplicities enhancing dialogue across cultures and arts education disciplines.

Barbara Bickel
December, 2021

Stories that Mattered

Introduction

Peter London

Each of our authors are prepared and dedicated teachers, each knows their discipline, each loves their career as teacher. Their professional affiliations follow their articles. The settings of these stories all take place in the classrooms of formal educational institutions, their students prepared, as anyone can be, to learn. Yet, something happened at the moment of meeting that disrupted the plan and everyone's sincere intentions and something different and more and better, eventually, evolved. These several stories are eyewitness accounts of what happened. Each account is quite different in circumstances and consequences and the voice of the story teller. There is however a significant common theme throughout, perhaps such is the case with every story when the human condition resides at its center. One such central theme is that every plan intended to enhance the quality of life for others' must consist of a grave abstraction of the maddeningly complex phenomena humans necessarily are. And, the more detailed the plan is formed the more it must leave out. Once such deletion is the signifying right of humans to say, no matter the request, "I'd rather not." And that pesky response, so disheartening to the plan and its planner, turns out, more often than not to be somehow better for both the subject of the pain and its author! Each of these stories tell how.

The initial story is the simplest in telling, yet the pivot between fore and aft in its way is the greatest; a whole new dimension of what a teacher is for, what teaching is for, and when is a student more than a student. And the teacher, in this telling of **Peter London's** article, "Melvin Gets a Passing Grade", recounts an early incident in his career as a high school art teacher in which he is forced to decide, despite his past experiences as a student and as a newly minted teacher, which world he would rather be in, the one he knew, or a possible world perhaps much larger, perhaps better, but certainly much different. The next story "Amelia's Gift," by **Danny Mydlack**, tells of a student, not all that unusual at first meeting, who turns out to be much more (isn't that true of everyone) and forces open the doors of perception. The next story, by **Rochelle St. Martin Pettenati**, "I Hate you, I love you..." is the not uncommon one of a new teacher wanting the very best for each of her students, only to be rejected by them, and how she had to reframe her views of teaching, enlarging it sufficiently to not only include her plans for her students but now must also include her students. **Jane Bates**, an experienced teacher, a well-known author in the field of art education who wrote a National Art Education publication, *The Teaching of Art*, tells in her article, "Keep on Going," of having a similar recent experience teaching trying a new holistic perspective in curriculum and pedagogy that Rochelle, the brand new teacher experienced. Well versed in the history and philosophy and practice of holistic art education, but never practicing

such, Dr. Bates was as confounded and brought to a juncture between her best of intentions and preparations, and the general dynamics of her class who said, most emphatically, we'd rather not. **Bonnie Berkowitz's** article, "The Bridge," tells of confrontations between the fields and their students, of fine arts and art therapy. Both of which she was adept at, but each taught in different settings and purpose. The curriculum and the pedagogy of each being - as now practiced, quite different, how to teach the rewards of each with one body of students. And, how she resolved the dilemma.

Liora Bresler, a major researcher, author, editor in the field of art education relates in her article, "Aesthetic and Pedagogical Compasses: The Self in Motion," how she confronted many converging - and disparate fields, cultures and missions and pedagogies as well as differently prepared and motivated students to - somehow, bring them and herself into consonance, an emergent harmony doing, again somehow- justice for all.

David Pike, recounts in his article, "Do Teachers Know this?" a dilemma that many members of our species encounter whose intellect allows them to perceive patterns and possible meanings in the world heretofore unavailable to many, in this case, to many of his students. How to explain what is in the world to those whose area of acquaintance with the world is smaller than their own? Not unlike the story Plato describes in his essay, "The Allegory of the Cave." Freed from the shadow reality he and the other captives of the cave share, he ascends to daylight, sees what the manifest world is as it appears in the light, then faces the daunting task of returning to his colleagues in the dark, and to explain to them, what they see and know is not all there is, we have been mistaken, there is more and better beyond. How to convey for the cloistered mind, difficult to perceive features and patterns of the world in an accessible vocabulary and pedagogy? How to recover from a student's evaluation of your teaching, and realize, "You know, she has something there." When the student's response to the question, "How might the teacher improve this course?" answers: "Speak English."

Holly Edwards, a professor of art history, in her article, "A Story Without End..." faced the perennial and now extremely pressing question in the design of what to teach and how to teach it; *How is this relevant?* Right now. How to make your personal experiences in another time and place relevant to this time and this place. What teacher (parent, preacher, mate, friend) alive to this world can avoid such engagement? **Shireen Soliman**, in her article, "Fashion, Identity and the Muslim-American Narrative," writes of straddling two cultures, each composed of different histories and values and practices, views of themselves and views of all others, and viewed by all others as different, thus to varying degrees, enigmatic. How to position oneself in such a manner as to bring one's full self into the teaching arena, welcome all others to do so as well, and while in this arena of mutual becoming bring all parties to experience the occasion to more deeply know and respect the other, and in so doing, more fully to come to know and respect ones' own self. **Alexandra Fidyk**, in her article that closes this issue, "The Art of Storying a Life" fittingly invites the teller and the listener of the story to unite in witness, in *copoiesis* and thus beget the power of *communitas*.

Melvin passes Basic Art

Melvin Passes Basic Art

Peter London

Abstract

The author assigns a failing grade to a student in a high school required art course as a consequence of the student not doing any art at all. His chairman, stunned that anyone can actually fail art, offers a view of art and teaching and history that up ends the author's own views on the purposes of art, the purposes of teaching and his possible role in history. Confounded by the realization that there might be a domain different, more and better than the one he had been navigating, the author changes the student's grade, he was, after all, a deserving fellow of a philanthropic embrace, changes his own teaching and hopefully changes the world towards a somewhat better one.

This is a true story about a young man named Melvin who was enrolled in my high school Basic Art Class. To satisfy high school leaving requirements every student in the New York City school system at that time, the 1960's, was required to take and pass, amongst a number of other required courses, an art-type class. Therefore many students in those courses did not actually elect to be there. Certainly that seemed true for my basic art classes. Most students put up with this imposition and went along doing what the teacher asked them to do. Melvin was quite pleasant in refusing to do any art work at all in my art course. I tried to interest him in doing anything he liked to make, *anything*, but he always replied, Mr. London, I don't do art. I explained that this was an art course, and I would be most happy to allow him to do any art like thing and help him to do so. He said, always politely, Thank you Mr. London, but I don't do art. I explained that I would have to fail him if he didn't do any art at all. Any kind, just show some effort, and I would pass him. Melvin explained that he failed most of his courses anyway and he was just waiting until he turned sixteen to drop out of school. OK, Melvin, that's it? That's it. At the end of the term, what else could I do but give Melvin an "F"? And I gave Melvin an F.

As was procedural, the Chairman of my department reviewed my grades before officially submitting them, and noticing that I had entered a failing grade asked about how that person failed art. I told him this young man did not fail art, he didn't do any art, he failed to do anything. Really, said my Chairman, Was he disruptive? No. Did he bother the other students? No, in fact he was quite friendly and chatted with the others who didn't seem to mind that he did so. Was he helpful? Yes, he helped tidy up the room, ran errands for me. So why did you give him a failing grade, he seems like quite a decent fellow? Why? Because this is an art class and I am an art teacher and I am supposed to grade the student on the effort as well as the outcome of those efforts to make art.

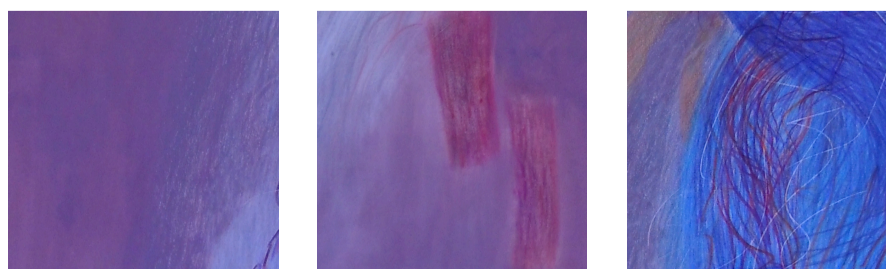
Well, yes, Peter, my Chairman said, In that case this young man deserves to fail an art course. You are dutifully carrying out your responsibilities as an art teacher in a high school required art class and grades are given for making art. This young man is a student in an art class and is required to make art and be graded on his effort and quality of art work. You were right to fail him. In that world.

But Peter, there is another world right along side of that world. In this world there is a young man, the same young man that appeared in your art class. This person would benefit from something he does not have and will likely never have because of how he came to be. He is pleasant but like many, he has a fault; he cannot do something that many other people find easy to do. In this case, make art. It happens all the time. Also in this world there is a somewhat older man, you, and you have plenty of what this young man does not have. In this world, deserving and not deserving is hard to assign, so much of both worlds turning on ten thousand things and dumb luck. You could give this man something he needs and you have, in fact you make these things up; a “C”, or even a “B”. And you could give him one of these things, a grade, in this instance, out of mere kindness. Kindness undeserved, but that is no more than what so much of life is, undeserved. So, Peter, you could be an agent of historical imperatives and this young man and you would continue on your separate life trajectories, fulfilling everyone’s expectations. Or, you could change history, at least his and yours by a certain form of understanding and a not so random act of kindness.

Let me know what you decide and I’ll submit the grade. Melvin got a passing grade.

Author Biography

Peter London, Chancellor Professor Emeritus, University of Massachusetts Dartmouth. Distinguished Fellow, The National Art Education Association. Founding Chair, Art Education Department, UMD. Recipient, NAEA’s Viktor Lowenfeld Award, Honorary Doctorate, Maryland Institute College of Art. Taught and lectured in universities and art centers across the Americas, Europe, Israel and Japan. Author of dozens of articles on art and the creative processes, several books; “No More Secondhand Art,” “Drawing Closer to Nature,” and the forthcoming, “The Practice of Art.” Co-founder and first President NAEA’s Caucus on Spirituality in Art Education, Co-founder of Artizein. Designer, New Bedford Holocaust Memorial, President, New Bedford Center for the Arts, ArtWorks, Peter’s current art exhibition, the Pence Gallery, Davis, CA, “The Soul of Nature.” His professional papers are archived at Southern Illinois University, Special Collections.



Amelia's Gift

Danny Mydlack

Abstract

Professor Danny Mydlack recounts the mysterious arc of his student's creative unfolding. Amelia, a middle-aged single mom, drops out of the personal videography production class before the end and yet her final assignment is delivered, posthumously, by her adult daughters. For the author, Amelia returned him to the core principles from his student days: the vast, wide terrain that is the true realm of art-making and an embrace of the fullness rather than merely the fineness of art practice. Mydlack proposes that with teaching there is more unseen than seen, more beyond our manipulation than within it, and that pedagogical satisfaction may be partly illusory.

In the video, a stream of water shot straight down from the top of the frame in slow motion, a foaming column, writhing, twisting, curling in arabesques.

Nearly six months earlier, at the start of the fall, Amelia was the last to enter the classroom to take the one open seat in the circle of chairs I'd arranged. She looked closer to my age than the gathering of fresh undergrads.

We introduced ourselves and the first student decided to rattle off the name of their hometown, their academic major and whether they were a freshman, sophomore, junior, senior. The others followed suit. At her turn, Amelia, in a strong Jamaican accent, simply said, "Amelia is an Islamic name, means someone hard-working, diligent."

Every semester I lose one or two students in the course. They quit coming to class. At some point their name disappears from the electronic roster. If I search, I find their individual record with a 'W' (Withdrawn) next to my course number.

I like to think it doesn't affect me but, as the years accrue, I seem to carry with me these lost souls who have withdrawn. The successes, on the other hand, those students who complete the course, I have celebrated with them in their time and they've moved on from my concern. But the 'W's accumulate.

"I've taught this course for 15 years," I explained to them. When I was hired, I'd volunteered to teach documentary video even though the popular course was fiction film production. As I saw it, no student really *wanted* to learn documentary; some students wanted to side-step all the script-writing/rewriting, actor-auditioning, and crew-wrangling that the fiction course required. My class was the alternative.

From the beginning, I have wanted to promote reality videos as art, not just as information. I've wanted to show how juicy this ordinary life was, how fulsome yet fleeting - stranger than fiction. For me, life is writing its own script all the time nonstop. People everywhere are performing their roles, unrehearsed, exquisitely. The lighting, the sound, the angle of view is unfolding in super-high-resolution, moment by moment.

I glanced around the circle. A few students were looking at their phones. Amelia had filled the margins of my syllabus handout with tiny notes that spilled onto the backside.

The course is rough-sledding, gruesome at times. For the weeks we aren't reviewing the student's take-home assignments, we train up in the tools and skills. Nobody wants to show their work early on in the semester. Later on, most do.

In the early assignments, students partner. They practice interviewing each other, following each other with the camera to get footage, and then edit these bits together into short presentational pieces. Amelia did not live on campus. Amelia lived in her own home and continued to work the night shift as a lab custodian at the local hospital. After surviving the loss of her husband and raising her two little girls, Amelia had relented to give college another try.

Each semester anew, it is a big undertaking and I'd learned, painfully over many years, to break the course down into do-able assignments. We start with videography skills: meticulous hands-on instruction to master the school's state-of-the-art camera. The students refer to it as the hundred-button beast. There are shotgun microphones and lighting kits and there are also interviewing tricks and shooting strategies.

In assignment #1, students shot and edited together a sequence of footage evoking a sense of place and including revealing details (referred to as 'B-Roll'.) The students dutifully gathered the various bits of wide-shot exteriors, carefully-framed interiors, and select close-ups. The clips demonstrated proper lighting, correct exposure, and clean sound. The other students included glimpses into their personal lives - messy desktops, walls plastered with posters and art, and even footage of personal fancies: quirky hobbies, passionate causes, and alternate identities.

Amelia completed her assignments on her own, unpartnered. I recall she included an opening shot - a straight-on view of a hospital entrance, then a sequence of empty hallways leading to a closed door. The next shots included carefully composed views of a lab interior and a variety of details: gleaming just-waxed tile floors, a row of stools tucked under a workstation, and glassware arranged on shelves. It was well-lit, exposed properly, and framed immaculately. It looked like stock footage and I did not say out loud that it felt soulless to me.

On these days when students show their assignments, we carry out a form of feedback I've developed over the years through trial and error. I've adapted it from a chapter in Peter London's 1989 book "No More Secondhand Art." I refer to it as 'the believing game.' We refrain from the usual responses:

- 1) I liked it...
- 2) I didn't like it...
- 3) This part really worked...
- 4) Here's how you can fix it...
- 5) You should see this other filmmaker...

Instead, we momentarily 'believe' in each video as they are screened and we attempt to describe, moment by moment, what each of us noticed on the screen, where our attention was drawn, what we thought was going on, and what associations to our

own direct lived experience it kicked up - especially connections that are seemingly non-logical.

It's a very demanding task for most undergraduates but presenting it as a game seems to appeal to their appetite for a challenge.

To encourage a sense of reciprocity, whoever screens their assignment must, in turn, serve as the respondent to the other student who responds to their work.

Ben sat in the back row. He always arrived in shorts, (even in February) out of breath and propped his battered skateboard against the radiator. I called on Ben to respond to Amelia's B-roll assignment. He freely associated memories of the summer he'd filled in at his father's dental office, sanitizing the metal tools, restocking the medical supplies. He recalled the smell of isopropyl alcohol, the whine of the drill. He commented that as he watched Amelia's shots of the immaculate tiled lab floors that he fantasized skateboarding across their expanses alone at 2am, his urethane wheels squealing on their surface. It was all Ben, true to form, a reliably irreverent and authentic voice from that semester's course.

In turn, Ben showed his montage of skating footage. Ben deliberately had shot with a thrift store camcorder from the 1980s. The footage was grainy and color-smeared and it glitched and rolled out of sync. Ben's camera caught chaotic scenes of his pals, somewhere in a tangle of woods, where a crumbling concrete foundation served as a skateboard arena. One by one, the stringy-haired teens launched themselves across the concrete, bucking up, flipping their boards end-over-end. But Ben had edited out the sounds of grinding and scraping and dubbed in its place what sounded like 'elevator music,' the saccharine easy-listening strains of violins. The effect was unexpected, ironic and subversive.

When it came time for Amelia to respond, she was silent. We waited. I offered the suggestions I normally gave to respondents. She recounted the stream of questions that had flooded her mind watching Ben's video: "Who are these boys and is this a school day? What do their girlfriends think of all this? Whose property are they on and did they get permission? Did it hurt to fall so much?"

I was about to move on to the next student when she added, "...the music...it makes it seem like you are in a dream..."

Our mid-semester Assignment #2 focused on interviewing. In pairs, students took turns interviewing each other and then edited the best bits into a short piece. I'd prepared the class before this assignment with my 'mother of all lectures' in which I revealed that I thought that the secret of 'story' is 2, not 1. That is, a 'story' happens at the edge of two things. These things can be opposites in a life/death struggle. But, way more often, these two things are simply contrasting elements, realities, or forces. Sometimes the 'story' is a matter of one thing laid gently across another. I suggested interview questions like "tell me something that is mis-matched in your life..." or "what are two criss-crossed wants you have?"

On screening day. Bekka portrayed Ross as a 'bicycle-riding anarchist who loved his job at Ace Hardware policing the nuts and bolts aisle, maintaining strict order.' Brett portrayed Mark as a 'devout, scapular-wearing Catholic who was the biggest science-geek.' In Amelia's video, she spoke straight at the camera, detailing her daughters'

achievements at school, their current jobs, and even their dating/ marital statuses.

With three weeks left in the course Amelia went missing. I checked the electronic enrollment and saw the “W” (withdrawn from course) next to her name. On the final day, the students presented their finished Assignment #3, their two-minute and thirty second self-portraits and we celebrated with donuts and tea.

Early in the next semester I received an email request for an office appointment. I didn’t recognize the name but assumed it was an inquiring in-coming student. On appointment day there was a light tapping at my door frame and two young women walked into my small office. I unfolded an extra chair so the three of us could sit.

They explained that their mom, Amelia, had taken my course. I immediately saw Amelia’s likeness in their features. Amelia had passed suddenly after a brief illness last fall. One of them rummaged in her backpack and produced a scratched-up smart phone. She clicked on an icon and scrolled until she found the video clip.

Her daughters leaned over me from behind, their mom’s phone on my knee. From what I could discern, Amelia had positioned the camera at the lip of her kitchen sink, facing the faucet spout, and had turned on the tap full-volume. She’d set the camera to record super slow-motion. The same daughter suddenly grabbed the phone saying, “wait...” She drew the phone to her face, fingered the buttons, and then set it back on my knee, tapping ‘replay.’

It was the same clip and yet it was completely new. The daughter had unmuted the audio. Fading up from black, the foaming alabaster column appeared but this time preceded by the first delicate piano notes of Debussy’s ‘Claire de Lune.’ In the waterfall, one could follow the emergence and follow the trajectory of individual bubbles, dropping in at the top of the frame, carried in a rush, falling, tangled with others, some overcome in the spume, falling, down into a braid of bubbles, and then, gone, out the bottom of the frame.

After two minutes and thirty seconds the image faded and the last chords of Clair de Lune hung and a title screen appeared: Assignment #3, Amelia.

How did Amelia make the leap from what I had seen as the dry listing of her daughters’ accomplishments in Assignment #2 to the deft poetic evocation of her Assignment #3 self-portrait? Was her final assignment a display of her mastering the course materials or just luck? Did Amelia herself wonder about that as she edited the final piece and played it back to herself? Was she making art or was art making her?

Was there, perhaps, something much more potent going on in her previous class assignments - the almost antiseptic footage of her workplace interiors, and the self-aversion and refocus on her daughters...? How does the final project of Amelia’s fit in with the projects from the rest of the students? Was it a facile short-cut. Would anyone else viewing the piece recognize its poetic merits?

Clearly, Amelia’s adult daughters (one an engineer, the other a dental technician) saw enough to seek me out and present the lost video. In that moment in my office nearly everything went unsaid. I had a lump in my throat even after we’d clasped hands and said

goodbye. I didn't ask for them to send me the video and I resisted following up.

Was she making art or was art making her? Since that event (a few years in the past now) I find myself considerably less sure when assessing a student's progress in my course. I feel I know less, not more. I feel less capable as a salaried instructor. I more acutely feel the shifting valence between the student and the assignment and I am more suspicious of the outward appearance of results.

I know some of my students pick up on this. At the end of each semester, student's feedback on the course evaluation now regularly include a couple of comments complaining that they would "prefer more hard criticism" and more clarity regarding "good or poor work." I believe now there is more unseen than seen, more beyond our manipulation than within it, and that pedagogical satisfaction may be partly illusory.

For me, Amelia's gift was an eye-opening return to core principles from my student days. My studies with two mentors returned to the fore. Among many, many things I learned from him, Dr. Peter London unbundled for me the vast, wide terrain he proposed as the realm of art. I took as my personal mission his embrace of the fullness rather than merely the fineness of art practice.

My later studies of Allen Kaprow's work and writings helped articulate for me the art/life conundrum. Between 1971 and 1982 Kaprow published four essays in prominent art magazines that were eventually published in the book "Essays on the Blurring of Art and Life." A phrase Kaprow coined returned to me, "art in the service of life." I would like to think that, near the end, that was how Amelia employed her brief videography instruction.

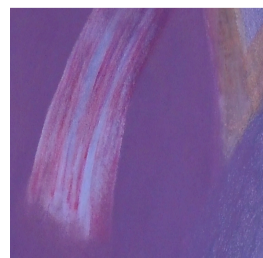
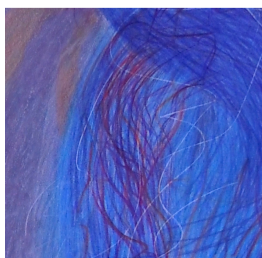
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Author's Biography

Danny Mydlack has received proper training and a thorough vetting by widely-recognized institutions among them the Massachusetts College of Art, The University of California San Diego and the Boy Scouts of America. In conspiracy with his students, Danny explores the finer arts of creative pursuits along with the nuances of its tangled history. Towson University manages Danny's access to their students in an arrangement where provocation is traded for college credit; he is formally listed on their faculty roster as 'Professor.'



Reflections

Reflections, Relationships & Art Class

Rochelle St. Martin Pettenati

Abstract

My homeroom class was 8H. At that time the district grouped students homogeneously by rank or GPA. The “lowest” ranking class was 8H and they were mine. I remember the first day I met them, I was full of knowledge after completing my Master of Art Education just a few months before. I knew just what to do, just what to say. Undoubtedly, the students would love and respect me, and I would inspire them and teach them to love art. They would use art as another language for learning, I would differentiate to meet their needs and identify their “intelligence” based on Howard Gardner’s work (I had his book handy, just in case!). They would become lifelong learners--, after all this was all part of my newly developed teaching philosophy.

Students began filtering into the room. “Who the “f” are you?” some of them asked. Most of them ignored me. Some brought coffee and snacks, one sat under my back table, a couple on the window sills, and a few quietly sat at their desks. I introduced myself to the kids that were listening, I tried to engage with kids that weren’t and somehow, I got through it. It was the longest 15 minutes of my life.

I knew right away that I was completely unprepared for these circumstances. I felt like an impostor. Although I lived in the same city they did, I went to private schools. I was a 35-year-old white woman, in a racially and ethnically diverse school, with no, “street cred” as my students freely told me. I needed to figure out how to earn their trust and respect, and I needed to do it immediately.

I hate you. I love you.

You suck.

You are the best teacher.

I hope you die.

I wish you were my mom.

I don’t have to do anything, art doesn’t count.

This is my favorite class.

I wish I never met you. You changed my life. R.P.

Over twenty years ago I began teaching art in a large city in Massachusetts. I was hired to teach at what we referred to as, “The Academy,” the middle school, on the right side of the tracks. Where the lawyer’s, doctor’s and politician’s kids went to school. The fine arts director asked me to meet her at the office where I expected she would take me to meet the principal and show me my room.

Instead, she drove me to another middle school, the toughest school in the district, where teachers didn’t last a full day never mind a full year. I was completely speechless and told her there must be a mistake. She broke the news to me that someone with political connections got the other job, and if I wanted to get my foot in the door, this was the only job available.

I will never forget walking through those doors. The school was completely run down with broken windows, broken lockers, and no principal. But there was a whole group of dedicated teachers who inspire me to this day. I moved into the art room, put up posters, hung up some of my artwork, took a deep breath, and started my journey.

My homeroom class was 8H. At that time the district grouped students homogeneously by rank or GPA. The “lowest” ranking class was 8H and they were mine. I remember the first day I met them. I was full of knowledge after completing my Master of Art Education just a few months before. I knew just what to do, just what to say. Undoubtedly, the students would love and respect me, and I would inspire them and teach them to love art. They would use art as another language for learning, I would differentiate to meet their needs and identify their “intelligence” based on Howard Gardner’s work (I had his book handy, just in case!). They would become lifelong learners--after all this was all part my newly developed teaching philosophy.

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I joined something called the Student Assistance Team (SAT). a group of teachers who meet regularly to discuss students having difficulty and how to mentor them. We had to give up two prep periods a week, but I was willing to try anything. We met as a team once a week. We would then meet with our mentees either before or after school, at the library, wherever and whenever we could. We were trained in grief counseling, drug abuse, neglect, and many other topics.

I thought I was beginning to get on the right track, a few students had come around and had begun to settle down and create some work. I wanted the students to create a mural for the new Student Assistance Center. Ironically, the title of the mural was “Increase the Peace.” One day, while some students were painting, a gang fight broke out. Colors were flashed, punches were thrown, and no one had ever told me not to jump in to stop a fight. I was injured and sent to the hospital.

My arm was severely sprained, and I needed an air cast. I was told to take some time out of work. I thought, no way! I will not allow these gang members to intimidate me. I went right back to homeroom the next day. Guess what? That day I started to earn “street cred.” The students began to see me as a person. I was vulnerable, breakable BUT I didn’t run. I stayed. I spoke to them about my life. I listened to their stories as they created their work. I realized my philosophy had changed; art was my vehicle, but fuel was relationships. I mistakenly thought I was the most important person in my classroom. I didn’t value my students’ stories. I realized I was the learner.

I stayed in that position for over 4 years. Throughout those years I built lasting relationships with students. During year two I became the facilitator of the Student Assistance Team. African American girls asked me if they could feel my “white girl hair,” of course I let them. Students shared with me how to hide so I wouldn’t get shot in a drive by. One student told me about her mother and her boyfriend prostituting her. Students came out to me, and I helped them tell their parents. I took students to meet with their parole officers. I created safe zones in individual teachers’ classrooms where students could take a break if they needed one. One of those years was extremely difficult with 36 students disclosing sexual abuse. I found a psychologist within walking distance of the school so I could cope with these and many other issues these young people had to deal with. And unfortunately, I had to learn that I couldn’t save them all.

A story that will stay with me forever is that of a young African American man that came to our school in seventh grade. He was referred to SAT because he was extremely quiet and didn’t mix in with the other students. I became his mentor. We talked about so many things, we created art together, we joked that our first names rhymed. One day he came to our meeting nearly in tears. He told me that everyone thought he was a criminal or that he was going to jump them or rob from them. I assured him this wasn’t true; he was one of the gentlest souls I had ever met. He explained that I didn’t know what it was like to be a young black man. He told me when he walked to school, people always cross the street before he passes them. He told me he was followed in stores and afraid to be accused of anything. I found it hard to breathe. I had never thought of what it was like to live in his skin. Although I tried to calm his fears, I knew he spoke the truth, and it broke my heart.

A large group of Cambodian families had emigrated to our city to escape the Khmer Rouge reign of terror. Many Cambodian students attended my school. Unfortunately, many of these students joined gangs, specifically the Bloods and Crips. I was asked to mentor a sixth grader named Rabi. Rabi was at the top of his class academically but always seemed sullen and sad. Initially, we developed a great relationship. I got encouraged him to create artwork based on his culture which he loved. He spoke about having to stay in the house after school because of drive by shootings in his neighborhood. He was worried about his younger sister and was responsible for her welfare as his father was absent and his mother worked nights. I got him a pet rat, which he loved, and he began to come out of his shell. He was so funny and confident at school and began to make friends.

I so wish this had a happier ending. In 8th grade Rabi joined a gang. I begged him not to, he was an honor student for God’s sake. He turned and began shouting at me, I was disrespecting his family, they were all in the gang and it was expected that he would represent. I felt like I had been stabbed straight through my heart.

He graduated and went to the high school. I prayed for him. I read that he had been arrested for a shooting and was incarcerated. I was inconsolable. I continued to pray.

A few years later I was at a restaurant and at the table next to me were 10 of my former Cambodian students. They invited my husband and I to their table. They recounted stories of their artwork and silly middle school antics. They spoke of me, trying my best to wrangle them and thanked me for never giving up on them. I burst into tears. Rabi weighed so heavy on my heart. I was afraid to ask them about him, I feared he might be dead. I finally asked them about him. They got him on the phone! He was in tears when he heard my voice. I was choking on my words. He had children, he got back on track! My prayers were answered! We have spoken periodically since that day, and I asked him why he felt as though he needed to join the gang. He stated that other kids would call them cat eaters and make fun of their looks and culture and he needed a group to feel part of, to protect him. I finally began to understand.

I realized how naïve I was. I believed my lessons based on the cultural heritage of my students and a once-a-year Cultural Night was enough. Once again, my lifelong learning journey continues.

From there I was transferred to two elementary schools that were feeder schools to the middle school. I was able to bridge the gap between elementary and middle by continuing to facilitate the SAT one afternoon a week. Helping students in both the schools was paramount, and I worked with School Adjustment counselors to ensure students had what they needed. You see, the elementary students were mostly the younger brothers and sisters of my former students. Their stories were the same and their needs were great.

One student that left a handprint on my heart was Ella. Ella is on the Autism Spectrum. I first met here when she was three years old. She was precocious and beautiful. She was also non-verbal. I usually begin my classes by gathering my students into a circle and sharing a book or a story. Oftentimes, Ella would sit on my lap during this time. When Ella was in kindergarten, she began writing streams of numbers into the thousands. Over and over again, she would write. She expanded into writing letters, but they were a jumble, and no words could be discerned.

One Friday, I was setting up and Ella came into the room in tears. She threw herself on the floor crying and screaming. I asked the paraprofessional what was wrong. It seemed she had scraped her knee at recess and needed a bandage but kept ripping it off. I tried consoling her without success. I decided to try giving her a paper and pencil. I asked her to try to write why she was so angry. She wrote, clear as day, I want a Hello Kitty Band-Aid. Needless to say, none of the adults in the room had dry eyes. I had Ella until 8th grade and keep in contact with her mom.

Unfortunately, every school I worked at was deemed under-performing by the department of education. We were told our students' social, emotional learning was unnecessary. School Adjustment Counselors were cut, Student Assistance Teams and Centers were disbanded, and the spaces were made into MCAS tutoring centers. It was a dark time.

Despite, the turn in education toward MCAS prep, teaching to the test and MCAS across the curriculum. I managed to write and receive a Creative Schools grant through the

Massachusetts Cultural Council. I was teaching at an elementary school that was considered a Gateway School. One third of our students were newcomers to the country. Children came from 27 different countries. Although I was not supported by my principal in regard to the grant, I was supported by my director and superintendent. The grant was for 4th & 5th grade students, and it lasted for two years. I partnered with a group from Boston called Tribal Rhythms. We met once a week for two hours (YES! I took two hours of "learning time" during MCAS!).

Teachers, students, and our partners became a tribe. We wrote multicultural, science, art and music-based plays. We made costumes, props, instruments, music, and art together. We performed our plays for the school and greater community. Our MCAS scores may not have gone up, but our students learned. They learned to work cooperatively using multiple intelligence. My non-native speakers felt that their voices were here. They all grew in ways not reflected in standardized tests.

Dedicated teachers continued to do the work to help our students. Clothing drives were still held, food pantries at the school level opened, and we continued to mentor and guide our students. I addressed the school committee many times to fight for arts education, social justice, Social Emotional Learning (SEL) centers and finally the pendulum has begun to swing back to PUT STUDENTS FIRST!

I was fortunate enough to win many teaching awards throughout my career at both the local and state level. The most precious award to me is my students. Currently, I am teaching at a community school in the same city my career began all those years ago. My students range from 3 years old to 14 years old, I am blessed to watch them grow up. I had many of their parents in school. I still participate in SEL activities and my students know I am there for them no matter what.

I want to share one last story. A story about Abby. I had Abby during one of the most difficult periods of her life. She was a middle school student placed in foster care due to parental substance use and mental illness. She referred to me as, "white bitch." Try as I might, Abby would not connect with me or any adult she was paired with. She graduated and went to high school. That Thanksgiving my niece Mary asked if she could invite a new friend to dinner. In walked Abby, and she has been a member of our family ever since. When Abby aged out of foster care, my father had recently died and she moved in with my mother for nearly ten years. Recently, she graduated from college and works for the Massachusetts Department of Mental Health giving back, mentoring, and helping others become independent and channel creativity.

I could write pages and pages of stories about the children I have had the honor to teach. But the honor is mine and I am their student.

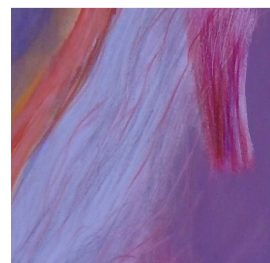
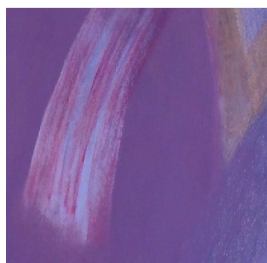
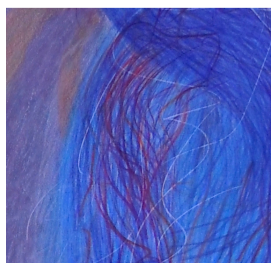
Author Biography

I, Rochelle St. Martin Pettenati was born in Pawtucket, RI in 1963 and began my art journey three years later. I found expressing my self through visual arts was my true voice. Luckily, I had tremendous role models throughout my journey including my high school art teacher Sister Gertrude Gaudette, Thomas O'Hara at Massachusetts College of Art and Design, where I earned my BFA 1985 and Virginia Freyermuth at the University of Massachusetts in Dartmouth where I earned my MAE 2000. I consider myself a lifelong learner having earned a Graduate Certificate in Fine Arts Leadership from Fitchburg State University as well as 60 additional graduate credits in classes I have always been interested in!

My teaching career began with oil painting instruction at the local art association and community college. When my sons went to school, I quickly realized that all children don't learn in the same way and started doing some research. Howard Gardner's multiple intelligence theory open my heart and eyes. I knew I needed to go back to school and become the art teacher I wish I had as a young child.

Currently, I teach over 500 students at a Pre-K through grade 8, Massachusetts Public School as well as Lead Art Teacher (grades Pre-K through 8) for the school district. I am lucky to see my students grow up both physically and artistically.

I am also a painter, exhibiting at local venues and galleries. I love creating art with my friend L.J. and my grandchildren as well as traveling the world with my husband.



Keep On Going...

Jane Bates

Abstract

In this article I make a case for holistic art education and demonstrate the transformative power of art and art teachers through two interconnected stories. The first is about my introduction to art in my sixth-grade class, and how this experience changed my life. The second, set more than fifty years later, is about my retirement from and return to teaching. These stories address why a holistic approach to teaching is so important and relevant today; relate how I came to develop my own approach; and describe how I implemented it in a teacher-training course. The message they send is that art matters and that we as artists and art educators need to keep on doing what we do.

Hearing, a year ago, that this issue of *Artizein* would be dedicated to “stories that mattered,” I was excited by the idea, as well as the possibility of responding to it. I needed something positive to focus on. I had recently published a book called *Uniting Body, Mind, and Spirit Through Art Education: A Guide for Holistic Teaching in Middle and High School* (Bates, 2020). Boxes containing copies of it had been shipped to Minneapolis just days before the 2020 National Art Education Convention was scheduled to begin and was then cancelled because of COVID-19. At this time, early in the pandemic, I could not yet see the big picture or what was still to come, and I was concerned over my lost opportunity to present my book in person and share experiences and stories with colleagues face-to-face.

Like all teachers, I have many stories about experiences in the classroom. A number of them are included in this book. Two, which are particularly fitting for the theme of this journal, I now take this opportunity to share here.

1953

I am eleven, and I have just arrived in my sixth-grade classroom. Before I got here, I had attended four other schools. I can barely read and write; the only state I can identify on the map is my own; and I don't know one fact about the Civil War. The problem was not one of nature—my brain worked fine—but nurture. When my brother and I were six and seven, our parents divorced, and my father walked out of the house, vowing never to see any of us again. He made sure we were secure financially, but my mother struggled on an emotional/psychological level. Whenever things got to be too much for her, she sold our home, packed up her things (my brother and me among them), and moved to another place.

I share this not only because of its significance in my own development and journey, but also because of its relevance in education. Anyone who has ever spent time in the classroom has come to see at some point that teaching is about nurturing the student as much as addressing the subject. Clearly, if our recent experience of confinement, isolation, and education restricted to distance learning has taught us anything, it is the importance of attending to the holistic well-being of learners.

Art educators are particularly well-positioned to do this, to perceive and respond to the needs and expressions of students. My sixth-grade teacher certainly knew how to do this. What or who she initially saw in me – a shy, insecure pre-adolescent perceiving herself to be invisible – I do not know. I was far too withdrawn to reveal anything about myself or my life. I do know, however, that she went out of her way to draw students out, draw students in, and draw students together through games, collaborative activities, music, and art. All of this, the art part especially, delighted me. I had spent countless hours at home, in my backyard, in the eucalyptus groves of my neighborhood, climbing trees and quietly communing with nature and my inner world through drawing and painting. I loved art. And I knew that I was good at it, that it was something I could do – but I had yet to reveal my true ability in the classroom.

Then one day it happened: the teacher asked us to look through science books and paint a picture of something we were interested in. Not knowing its significance as a symbol of transformation, I chose the monarch butterfly. I drew four variations on a large sheet of paper; I mixed the perfect combination of reddish-orangish-brownish paint; I detailed the wing patterns in the most delicate lines. It took weeks. But during this time something else was happening: other kids began to notice me, talk to me, even come to me for advice on their projects. I became known as “the class artist.” I’m not invisible at all! I am a real person. I have an identity – and I matter.

Art matters. Artists matter. Art teachers matter. And this particular teacher, Miss Williams, mattered more to me than she could ever have known. Inspired and emboldened by my experience in her class, I went on to become an art teacher, beginning a journey in 1965 that would last a lifetime. I was on a quest to make art, to experience the joy of artmaking, and to help others have such experience. This proved to be more challenging than I had imagined, however, and as I continued on, the path only got steeper...

2006

By now I have managed to pass sixth grade; progress through middle school, high school, and college; and build a career over a forty-year period teaching learners ranging from five-year-olds to graduate students. It is 2006, the year that, in order to care for my terminally ill husband, I retired. I am at this point running an art education program at a large university. I am teaching undergraduate courses during the day, graduate courses at night, and on my non-teaching days supervising student teachers, meeting with advisees, writing curriculum, and attending committee meetings. I am not making art or engaging in aesthetic experiences or feeling the joy of artmaking.

But, after my retirement and my husband's death a year later, I had a space in my life – a great, gaping hole, actually – which I filled with art. Holed up in my “cave” (make-shift studio in the basement), I dug into the experience, tearing, cutting, layering, gluing paper, making a series of images inspired by natural forms (flowers, seedpods, trees). I embellished these with radiant slivers of silver and gold foil, attempting to capture the energy, the vitality, of my husband, myself, nature, the Cosmos. I called this series “Life Force.”

I stayed in my “cave,” my inner space, for well over a year. When I was ready to rejoin the world, I shared my work with a colleague who invited me to give a presentation in his class, a master’s level course for experienced art educators. The following week I arrived with arms fully loaded and pinned my work on the bulletin board. I asked the students, most of whom I had trained as undergraduates and knew well, to respond to it. One said it reminded her of O’Keeffe. Another saw a similarity to Klimpt in my use of gold foil. Another made a connection to Mondrian's abstract trees. Without any knowledge of the context in which I had created this work, the students had no way of delving deeper, of going beyond surface characteristics and understanding what these pieces were about or meant to me. And I was no help. Not knowing how to move into a conversation on such sensitive content, I simply nodded. Finally, a student whom I did not know said, “There’s something else going on here. There’s something you’re not telling us.” Tears welled up in my eyes as I thought about everything I was reluctant to tell them for fear I'd cry. Then I told them – and they cried.

At this point, none of us knew what to say or what to do with such intense feelings. We just sat for a while, in this shared space, silently communing with one another. When the time felt right I thanked my host and the students, and we all packed up our things and walked out, back to our separate lives. When I got home I was still quite shaken – I had cried in class, I had made others cry – but eventually I came to see, on a much deeper level, how transformational this experience was: I had been challenged to reveal myself and explain my art, to be real. This brought up all my old fears of exposing myself to the world as the person I really was. I felt extremely vulnerable. But in stepping out of my comfort zone, pushing past my tears and my fears, and telling my story, I crossed a boundary, a threshold, and walked through a door – and I had to keep on going...

What this meant, exactly, I did not yet know. But I did know that I had just participated in a profoundly moving encounter with these students. My tears had been an expression of my grief; theirs, an expression of their sensitive, caring, empathetic response to me. This experience had gone beyond sharing of my *art* to sharing of my *self*. The artwork had become a vehicle for connecting. Understanding this, I now knew what I had to do: I had to continue to make art; I had to continue to share myself as an artist and a teacher; I had to return to the classroom; and I had to find a way to involve students in making art, sharing art, and connecting through art in meaningful educational experiences.

My opportunity to do all this came in the form of an invitation to return to the university and teach a graduate-level course in multicultural art education. This was a course that I myself had developed, in the 1990s, but had not taught in many years. I thought I could use it as a base in moving into a holistic approach that honors the lives of learners by inviting students to address themes of deep importance and meaning to them (for example, as in my case, losing a loved one). When I reviewed my old syllabus, however, I was taken aback by the size of the gap between what I had once done and what I now envisioned. Reflected in it was an approach typical of educational practices of the time: students were introduced to various people(s) and their artworks, provided with cultural information pertaining to the works, and then directed to make objects that emulated them. These works were called “cultural exemplars,” serving as examples or models of what to make, and were usually presented at the beginning of a unit of study. I call this approach “exemplar-driven teaching.”

If I was to move from object-oriented, exemplar-driven teaching into a holistic, learner-centered, thematic approach, I needed to make some big changes. I began with a small one: rather than using the term “cultural exemplar,” I used “thematic exemplar.” This enabled me to present students with broad themes to which they could respond from their own perspectives and life experiences, as well as to address how others across time and place have reflected similar themes from their particular perspectives and life experiences. In this approach, thematic exemplars illustrate how ideas, concepts, experiences, and feelings have been conveyed in various ways through visual form. Using such an approach, I could encourage students to be self-expressive; help them connect with others within and outside that classroom; and move beyond what an artwork *is* (a thing, an object) and how it *looks* to what it *means* on a personal or cultural level.

My redesigned course, which I first presented in a five-week-long summer-session of 2011, was studio-based and thematically oriented. Themes included *identity* (promoting reflection on the self), *spirit of place* (promoting reflection on one's connection to the wider world), and *rite of passage* (promoting reflection on significant times/events shaping one's life). Because the themes were so broad, they allowed for a wide variety of interpretations, and in some cases motivated students to develop sub-themes of their own. For example, sub-themes addressed within the rite-of-passage unit included: (1) growing up, (2) firsts, (3) identifying as an artist, and (4) experiencing loss. To provide a focus for this unit, I chose masks as the art form. In presenting the studio problem, I directed students to create a rite-of-passage mask for a ceremony commemorating a time or event in their past, present, or envisioned future lives. To prepare them to address this problem, I asked them to make lists of significant events or times in their past, present, and envisioned future lives. For the thematic exemplar, I chose cross-cultural ritual and ceremonial masks, which I shared through books provided during studio time when students were working on their own masks.

My primary objective was to promote authentic expression. But, recalling my painful attempt to share my own artwork, I knew I had to go beyond this. I had to find a way to facilitate sharing. I did this through artist statements. These were new to me – I had not used them in my previous teaching practice – and they were new to most of the class members. Students were free to express anything they wished about their artmaking experiences, artworks, and the meanings and stories behind them. These statements not only served as a vehicle for students to present their works, they also prepared students to share on deeper, more personal levels. This meant for them, as it had for me, that they might have to step beyond the boundaries of their own comfort zones, take a risk, and be vulnerable. This was not easy; but it did happen. And there were moments when we all cried and laughed and hugged, sometimes simultaneously. In working together in a shared studio space, these students, collectively, created a safe container in which it was okay to be real.

As both makers and teachers of art, the class members enthusiastically responded to the course. They were all experienced educators having spent from five to twenty years in classrooms across the full pK-12 spectrum. They had had time to develop their own artmaking skills along with their teaching strategies. These, however, were largely informed by the exemplar-driven approach through which most of them had learned to teach. They clearly saw the limitations of this approach as well as the potential of a holistic, thematic approach to broaden and deepen engagement. And they were eager to return to their own classrooms and try out new ideas fitting for their own student

populations. To provide some insight into how they experienced the course and what they reflected back to me as being most significant, I present the comments below, excerpted from their journals and final reflection papers:

Art gives us meaning. We give art meaning.

This experience helped connect the spiritual/emotional/contextual elements of art with the formal qualities of art.

This class has become like a small artists' community. We have grown as artists by witnessing each other work, plan, and share.

At first, I was unsure of the artist statements, but I feel this is where I grew most as an artist... without the writing, I would not have found such personal meaning.

The class helped me to realize I am more than I thought I was.

Today I realized that as an artist I cannot create works that do not embody my spirit/soul anymore.

So often we are trained to show an exemplar, teach a technique, and let kids do their thing... I love the idea of brainstorming and discussing a topic to get kids thinking.

This class made me realize the importance of sharing your work and telling your story. The students I teach don't really get the opportunities they deserve to tell their stories. I look forward to the upcoming year and advocating for holistic teaching.

Teaching is a marathon, not a race... I'm going to have to feel it out when it comes to applying ideas about themes and holistic art education. I'm excited to go back to the classroom and find spots where I have already applied these concepts.

I want my kids to have an actual connection with all that they create, to feel something as they are in the process of artmaking.

Why are we teaching art if not to provide students with a way to discover, create, and reflect on meaningful things?

2021

Rereading these comments today, a decade after I first presented this course, I am reminded of what it was essentially about: finding meaning – as a person, as an artist, as a teacher, as a member of the human community. I could not have articulated this when the course began, but once it was over I saw it. And, wanting to keep this going, I made it part of the art education curriculum. Then I wrote a book addressing holistic art education at all levels, but focusing specifically on middle and high school teaching. It contains a chapter visually documenting the course, a chapter documenting how participants carried their learnings into their own secondary-level classrooms, a conceptual model of holistic art education, and stories reflecting how I came to develop this model and my approach to teaching. The two I tell here (the first about my introduction to art in Miss Williams's sixth-grade class and the second about my retirement from and return to teaching) are not separate tales, but intertwining strands along the continuum of my becoming/being/becoming an art educator. They reflect my own journey as a person, artist, teacher, and member of the human community. But more than this, beyond my particular experiences, they demonstrate the power of art and art teachers to transform a life. I offer them here, in these still so fragile and uncertain times, in the hopes that they can inspire us all to keep on going...

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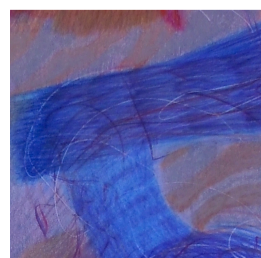
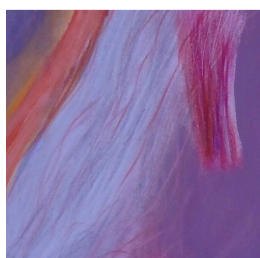
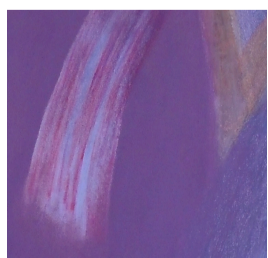
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Author Biography

Jane Bates is a professor emerita at Towson University, where for 20 years, she directed the art education program. A lifelong art educator, she has taught in California, Germany, New York, Arizona, West Virginia, and Maryland, mentoring learners ranging from kindergarteners to graduate students. She is the author of *Becoming an Art Teacher* (2000) and *Uniting Body, Mind, and Spirit Through Art Education: A Guide for Holistic Teaching in Middle and High School* (2020). Today she supports her granddaughters (ages 13, 14, 15, and 16) in their artistic pursuits as they progress through middle and high school.

Acknowledgments

To Peter London, who, nearly 30 years ago, introduced me to holistic art education and the experience of drawing in and from nature: Thank you, Peter, for guiding me and so many others through your wonderful workshops in the great wide world! They have informed the ways I think about, make, and teach art.

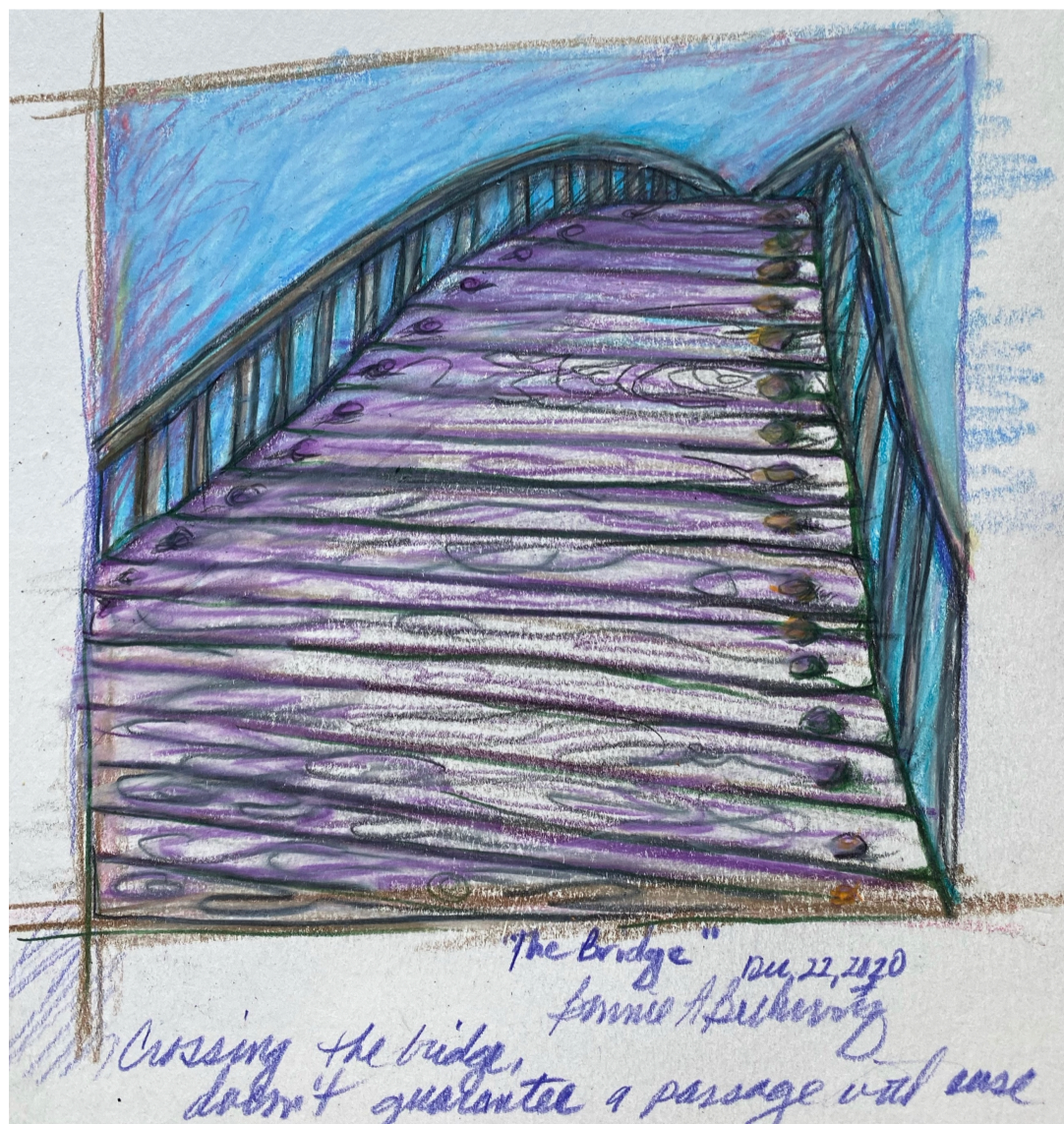


The Bridge

Bonnie A. Berkowitz

Abstract

Stories That Mattered: Inspired Stories and the Unfolding Arts Curriculum as a call for papers for Fall 2021 issue inspired this Art Therapy educator to consider and re-examine past teaching beliefs and practices, to underscore and understand with more clarity, how the dissonance between two styles of a classical Fine Arts and an Art Therapy Education became apparent in an Art Therapy graduate studio course. With a sharing of past experiences and ideology, Berkowitz writes about how the examination of quality and fears, about a fine arts critique and the nonjudgmental art discussion, highlight the need to increase communication with students, inviting them into a safe environment, where a conceptual bridge connects these two important aspects.



"The Bridge" Bonnie A. Berkowitz 2020, Derwent colored pencils, ®

Introduction

After every semester, I have become a smarter Art Therapy educator, based on what I came to learn from my students. I am a teacher who is rather passionate about my subject matter, learning through observation and practice about the importance of listening in the classroom. I reconsider what the students will take away with them at the end of the semester, as I prepare each lecture, demonstration, and discussion by making careful notations. As an artist, I am committed to the exploration of where materials and ideas collide in the messy, beautiful chaos of process and creation. And it is both teaching and artistry that have taught me to learn and grow alongside my students. It is during this process, that a brave student was able to tell her story, and in so doing helped me to build a bridge.

The Setting

In 2007, I accepted a half-time position at Caldwell University, to teach in both the undergraduate and graduate art therapy programs. I was specifically hired to develop the graduate course, at that time called Psychology of Art Materials, now named Art Therapy Methods. The intention of this entry level graduate art therapy studio class was to focus on a wide creative continuum designed to foster a self-reflective experience. For the next thirteen years, I watched as the program grew from 7 to 70 plus students, marking it as the first nationally accredited art therapy program with the Council for the Advancement of Higher Education Programs (CACREP). Because of the national accreditation, the program exploded in size. With this growth came the popularity of the Advanced art therapy graduate student program. The BA or BFA candidate was eligible to apply to the graduate program with 60 completed Undergraduate credits, with at least a 3.3 GPA. They were able to accumulate up to 12 credits for each, graduate and undergraduate program concurrently, prior to the receiving their BFA.

Recognizing the Problem

Within the Psychology of Art Materials course, the new graduate art therapy students were asked to explore mark making from the primitive and simple, to the complexity of integrative mixed media, with a focus on self-reflection. In each class, students were invited to tack up their weekly art directives. When initially asked to create and share assignments, the “*Advanced*” arts students’ hesitation was often palpable. They were fearful that personally themed artwork was going to be evaluated and measured to be either good or bad. This response was quite plausible as they were new to this experience and unsure about what they might expect. Unfamiliarity with the nonjudgmental art therapy critique, at first, led them to be cautious and feel vulnerable in front of their classmates. Art Therapy critiques, or nonjudgmental discussions generally focus on exploration of *what* is communicated through the image, with regards to the materials, style, and methods.

Over the course of the semester, the students were soon to learn how to “read” the visual marks without judgment, to view and describe the art with objectivity (manifest level), before discovering the underlying thoughts and meanings (latent content) and associations. Each individual student was asked to look, not only at their artwork, but also at their creative process, and how to identify intention (Allen, 1994). It is ironic, as learning to read the artwork begins with the core elements of art, something which the students are very familiar. It is exactly where the art therapy interpretation process begins with a concrete, evidenced-based framework; there is no secret or

magic. It simply begins with learning to “see” and describe the artwork as clearly as possible.

The Breakthrough

One night, late, at the end of class, Diana, an undergraduate “Advanced” student in the art therapy graduate program, asked to speak with me. She often seemed overwhelmed by her academic load, while at the same time, completing and executing her BFA Senior show. Maybe it was because of, or despite her full plate, she candidly spoke with me regarding the problem that she and other advanced students faced. She reported that it was difficult to navigate the differences in course critiques and expectations, comparing her fine arts studios and professors with that of the new guidelines of art therapy coursework. For most of her undergraduate career, she was told that aesthetics mattered, skill mattered. She explained about the conflict, stating that when she shared her original or spontaneously generated artwork, it felt like she was breaking all the rules. She was not alone, her peers felt similarly. Here in this art therapy course, as all were encouraged to experiment with themes and materials, it felt like everything she learned about becoming a formal artist was going to have to be abandoned. She did not know how to trust this new experience, how to integrate her classical fine arts training with that of spontaneously generated, or process-oriented art making.

With this new knowledge, the chasm between the two worlds seemed quite understandable. How had I missed this? It was now my objective to create a bridge, to honor both worlds and teach my students how to integrate both skill and spontaneity, with an intentional eye on what it means to address quality. This step is essential then, regardless of the style and method employed to create the art. The question posed and to be considered by each student, “how do I engage with specific aspects of making spontaneously generated art without having to abandon quality or skill?” Listening to and reframing internal dialogue about the making of the work, stepping back from the object and deciding what needed to be changed or altered with intention, was decidedly among the skills that added to best practices. Only experience and practice lead towards this end.

Although there were usually only a small percentage of Advanced art therapy students in my class, Diana’s dilemma highlighted what others might be experiencing as well but were unable to articulate. Everyone engaged in the class might benefit. The non-judgmental art critique process provided an understanding about how to access the underlying meaning, “*tell us about the story,*” as well as to acknowledge the student’s experience of creating the work. The act of creating art with an intention to not abandon quality, is where students like Diana, needed instructive comments to learn to look, think and feel about combining technique, after the experimentation and exploration of ideas had been established. Addressing intention at this point becomes so useful for the integration of skill and immediacy. It is in the very act of art making that the evidence of relationship with materials can become a barometer, how to engage with and witness what is accomplished, what is present, and how to stay the course even if it becomes tedious, frustrating or difficult. Just like in our human relationships, we work at it.

The students learned from each other, as they practiced sharing observations, first about their own, then, by semester’s end, about each other’s. They came to develop, improve and increase descriptive language, validating hard work, as well as their creative voices, both vocally and visually. They also learned to identify a range of styles, and methods of problem-solving, and how to apply questions without bias. For some, the

ability to integrate quality and spontaneity required perseverance. It became clear that what was essential in managing and navigating these new waters was time, investing more focus and patience, in the moment of making, relating and responding to the surface of the art. Learning to listen and look at their own uniqueness as a strength became the ballast of the bridge, the building blocks to link the walk from one side to the other. This invited a “back and forth” from craft to process, again and again.

Some History

I had never intended to teach art or art therapy and always wanted to be an art therapist. Beginning in the mid 1970's, my training began in state hospitals, and professional experiences led me to community mental health, with Adolescent inpatient units, day hospitals and later Adolescent intensive outpatient programs. After I had received my professional credentials, my art therapy supervisor encouraged me to attend a summer workshop. Without her insistence that I go to replenish my creative batteries, I might have never experienced The New Jersey Artist/Teachers' Institute (ATI), that provided me with a life-altering, and meaningful creative direction. I was challenged about my artistic beliefs and philosophy, especially about what my own creative voice sounded like. Over the span of ten years, ATI had informed and altered my personal art, as well as my art therapy practice. I experienced a paradigm shift, gently confronted by my teacher Jacob Landau, to “get out of the watchtower”. Taking such a leap felt like, I too, was abandoning skill and craft and everything that I was previously taught. But what I came to know, was that one was not sacrificed or abandoned for the other, and that experimentation and exploration leads to discoveries, a glorious place where the chaotic primacy of materials align, with access to the core elements of art. Returning to graduate school in 1986 to study Fiber Arts further influenced a deeper creative process, as Fiber arts was a perfect union to explore traditional materials applied to nonconventional forms. It was because of these experiences that I understood what my student, Diana had told me on that late Monday night after class, and how I knew then, that I was going to be able to help them build their own bridge.

Building the Bridge

It is clear, how one student can make such a difference. The conversation with Diana provided significant information to begin to mend the chasm that under my watchful eye, had formed a dividing river between the university's Fine Arts and Art Therapy programs. Imagine my surprise, that although I thought I was doing my due diligence, I was unable to see what was right in front of me. There is not one specific task that was going to connect skill and spontaneity. But like building a bridge with many planks, I was able to strengthen a foundation to integrate both the core elements of the arts with art therapy. Creating a link between the two styles provides a pathway to allow for the positive psychological principle of flow (Czikszentmihalyi, 2009), a back and forth, to cross the bridge, with ease, safety and stability.

I still believe that the most valuable tool that a teacher has is direct contact with the student. I spoke with the students, sharing my own experiences when useful, directly encouraging creative risk taking. While exposing some of my own creative vulnerabilities, I also encouraged the use of office hours, and extending communication through email, which I have to say, the latter was my least favorite way to be supportive. And in my last semester, we, (the world) were all forced to use an online platform for classes and meetings because of COVID-19. But with one-on-one zoom meetings, I was able to give students far more access to my office hours.

Tools for Building a Bridge

Modifications of instructive lessons were implemented through, utilizing class Review Time, lectures and demonstrations, non-judgmental critiques, journal writing to build observational and self-reflective skills through a specific writing instrument, art directives/assignments, including a final PowerPoint photo/journal personal gallery and also, a long-term book arts project.

Review Time

Each class began with a 10-15minute *Review Time*, adhering to a consistent agenda, including but not limited to questions about the previous week, the review included the following: clarification, debriefing and discussion of current art and written/reading assignments, highlighting instructive information gleaned from reading the students' journal entries from the prior week, of due dates, and ending with a question-and-answer period. The review time became an essential and expected class component where the students were invited into the process of participation and inclusion. Communicating in as many arenas as possible about integrating skill and spontaneity, and about making mistakes in art, reinforced how to be inventive, build curiosity, and be supportive to the students' overall creative learning experience.

Weekly Lectures, Demonstrations, and Assignments

There were many teachable moments to infuse pertinent information into *weekly lectures*. Open discussion at the end of lectures encouraged students to share stories about how their belief systems fed messages that were not always accurate or rational. I also lectured about the importance of the exploration of symbols, metaphors and archetypes, whose meanings are often found embedded below the surface of the product. I reiterated connecting to and the integration of what is seen, what is thought and what is felt, as a foothold to "reading" the artwork. We spoke often about frustration and frustration tolerance, as it related to using both familiar and unfamiliar materials. With this, came identification of the fundamentals of art within the experimental process, while increasing and uncovering access to the imagination and most importantly, how to address and speak with the inner critic. Relishing in final outcomes and feeling satisfaction as a result of brainstorming and examination of problem-solving begins to define a unique personal approach and identity, through how the art was completed.

Art directives were assigned weekly, bi-weekly, and long term, the latter to be worked on throughout the 14-week semester. Each directive was listed in the syllabus and posted on Blackboard along with the rubrics. The curriculum was designed to follow a creative continuum, from crayon, oil and chalk pastels, water-based paints, and then a range of sculptural materials. The themes also related to a continuum of emotional and cognitive levels of functioning, correlating specific media with stages of development. (Hinz, 2009) The rubrics were concrete. *Demonstrations* were limited to how to explicitly use the materials and apply them to themes such as childhood memories, family constellations, or identity. Though I was sometimes asked to do so, I rarely shared examples of my own completed art, because the overall content of the artwork needed to be intrinsic to each student. There was no check list, no right or wrong solutions. Sometimes the students complained that I did not "tell them what to do". Problem-solving and the acquisition of ideas from a deeper imaginative well, at first felt awkward, using raw materials to express ideas and concepts without specific details. I told them often to trust in the process (McNiff), and to be kind and patient with themselves, which sometimes presented a difficult challenge. The students were

going to have to learn to accept what was arising from within, to sit with the anxiety of not knowing what to expect. Only with experience were they going to feel more competent and confident while exploring new possibilities, referring to lectures, notes, reading about the creative process, and frustration tolerance. Patience and practice gave permission to let go and make mistakes. Writer, Wendell Berry wrote that art is a series of mistakes, and we get to choose the ones we want to keep.

The blind contour drawing series provided an example of letting go of preconceived ideas about what the art “should” look like. Following the rules of not looking at the paper, but rather at the artist’s subject, resulted in what was seen by focusing on the hand and eye moving together at the same rate of speed, the ball point pen’s line only as a recorded mark. It was a good parallel to accept the outcome, as eventually, over time, the exercise strengthened and fostered again, the importance of “seeing”.

Edith Kramer (Kramer, 1972) referred to art therapy as a three-pronged stool, built upon psychology, fine arts and Art Therapy. The latter is predicated on the combination of fine arts education and psychology. The art therapy student must learn to suspend belief about everything that they were told, to ingest the idea that it does not matter what the work looks like, and instead accept that what it communicates is where the gold lies. It is after all, easy to understand why quality might be sacrificed for spontaneity, at once a freeing act of imposed guidelines. Once the students were encouraged to experiment with a wide range of media, especially the unfamiliar, creating mysterious, original and unrecognizable marks gave them more license to re-create the wheel for themselves, as they had to test the boundaries in order to complete the directive.

A sampling of art assignments such as creating a Doorway, a portrait of a classmate only from listening to a few shared personal items, building a miniature theater box about a childhood memory, creating a family sculpture with found objects, and basic fiber arts materials and techniques (wrapped, coiled, free embroidery), or a table-top puppet, met the range of a vast continuum beginning with crayon, to 2-d mixed media, to yarns and threads, to rope, newspaper and tape.

The creative process can be unorganized and gritty. It is within the messiness, the relational aesthetics (Moon, 2002), physical making of the art, where the materials are left to tell the story of that process. Throughout art school, we are taught to improve skills and techniques, where we rarely show others our “mistakes”, the failed attempts, the unwittingly expressive process. Mistake making is the very place where we find the seeds that spark a way forward towards a discovery. While skill building provides confidence and mastery, experimental art making strengthens and fosters critical thinking and problem-solving skills.

Journal Entry Writing

The *Weekly Journal Entry* offered the students one of the most significant tools, to engage in a self-reflective writing practice whose subject is the artwork. With a very specific writing instrument, all were asked at first to write objectively about “what is seen”, describing an object with its core elements of color, shape, form, rhythm, texture, volume, etc. Secondly, they had to contemplate “thoughts about the artwork”, raising speculative questions and ideas about what had been made visible, and to raise awareness about the process of making the work, as well. And thirdly, they considered “what is felt” in relationship to the art and the process, about how thoughts are not the same as emotions. This system assists in delineating between an objective and subjective

response. With a consistent practice, thoughts and feelings are more easily and likely to be separated. This tool teaches a student how to see objectivity, in order to separate personal responses from those of their future clients. This is an essential strength to keep safe boundaries between therapists and their clients.

Passing this specific writing instrument along to my students built observational skills and provided a place for them to deepened self-awareness. I had first adopted this system of journaling from Mark Wilenski at Trenton State College in 1976; he was one of my earliest teachers who influenced my understanding of how self-observance is essential for any art therapy student and therapist. Since that earlier college experience, more than four decades ago, Mark's journaling style has given me an indelible learning tool, as I applied it, not only to teaching, but to my own clinical experience and artistic life.

While teaching, one of my weekly tasks was to read each of the students' journals, and to correspond on their typewritten entries. Providing each student with an individualized response fostered growth and development, having great benefit for those who allowed themselves to fully engage in the journal writing entries. Comments gave specific details to consider and incorporate into their next journal entry. They were taught to return to reread and identify places where the content needed to be sorted, to separate thoughts from feelings, to use third person for objective writing in Part 1, and first person for Parts 2 and 3. The students were surprised to find that the writing required as much time or sometimes more than the making of the art itself. My hope is that students might adopt this process as they continue to search for a balance of the two different energies of skill and spontaneity.

The Nonjudgmental Critique

With encouragement and permission, I often was relieved to witness the students' need to perform lessen over the course of a semester. The discussions took place in every class, and every teachable moment. As class size grew, it was difficult sometimes to make sure each of the students had equal time to talk about their work. They learned to redefine how "quality" may be integrated and represented in their artwork in the following ways: by reframing negative messages, such as "this is not good enough", by making inquiries into how to make changes in order to achieve more satisfaction in the verification (Hinz, 2009) of creating the art, to strengthen the ability to be more comfortable with making "mistakes", and how mistake making indicates a path forward. Setting new intentions became possible when considering what needed to be done to acquire their own approval, and specifically to alter and change the art piece, if so desired.

The students learned how to redefine terms, adding to a creative vocabulary while becoming more aware of the internal self-critical dialogue. Discussion about metaphor and archetypes, the universal stories that touch on personal narratives, led to deeper understanding about the latent content, without needing to imply deep psychological interpretations. First, we learn to read the art, what is "seen", which will lead then to what lies beneath. Redefining the aesthetically based criticism assisted the students to objectively see with compassionate eyes. Teaching students to describe their art in terms of a relationship, deepened their artistic relational, connection (Moon, 2002) as seen through physicality of the mark making. They began to describe their experiences with a sharper accuracy.

The students, too, appeared to be relieved to eventually see that the art therapy classroom, in fact, was a safe place to show and share their sometimes private, and personal works of art, a place without judgment, implicit or explicit. They stepped up, when asked to do what's hard, to be courageous and curious. In so doing, they were able to show a vulnerable side, that tender, sometimes fragile nature, which can feel like an enormous risk. Listening to and witnessing stories, thoughts and feelings strengthen an innate ability to become empathetic. This is an essential component and most helpful when beginning to build an art therapy practice. In the future, a large portion of their clients will be non-artists, who will experience a high level of resistance to share their artwork; the empathy will be vital.

Finally, in review, a confluence of three areas of particular importance in tandem with each other, occurred with regularity throughout the duration of the semester; (1) the weekly journal writing, (2) the photography of their entire expressive experience throughout the semester culminating in a PowerPoint photo/journal essay set to music as part of their finals, and (3) each student was required to write a final, Journal Summary paper, providing an independent look back to the beginning of the semester, to observe what they had learned, what was the take away, and to set creative goals for the next coming semesters.

It was there in the final celebration and viewing of the PowerPoint Galleries, and in the writing, that the students identified how they learned to see, to read the art, how the marks and the relationship with materials became evident on the surface, through color, line, shape, texture and aesthetics. Now, the core elements of art and art making provided them with the information necessary to proceed with experience and confidence to continue to experiment and explore unfamiliar territory. I so wanted all my students to do well, to learn and grow, to understand that the discomfort of struggle and toleration of this creative process is where the largess of knowledge is derived.

Conclusion

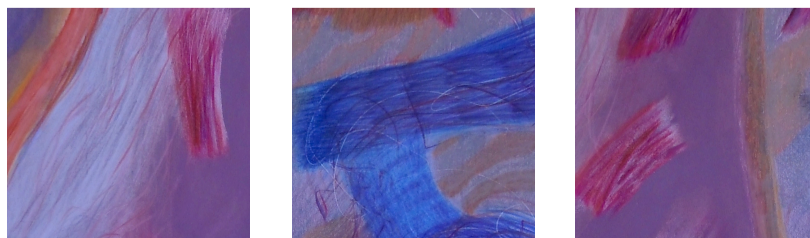
Throughout the past few decades, I have come to understand that both a classical academic art experience with spontaneously generated art must be creatively integrated to find the balance, the limitations and the freedom too, to learn and grow as artists and art therapists. Like a bridge across a river, the integration of the two sides connects skill-based art making with experimentation, to develop skill within an explorative method and a self-reflective practice. Broadening the students' ability to "look" at the quality as seen through core elements of art, and the content of the artwork, connected the duality of their own process. Again, I do not think that Mark Wilenski might have laid venture to guess as to how long into the future his style of journaling served so many. He gave me a tool that fostered independent thinking, one that I have used throughout my entire career, as an artist, art therapist, and art therapy educator. It taught me about what must be seen, and understood and the importance to identify thoughts, and honor what is felt. I am grateful to my students who were willing to do what's hard, that I was able to develop this writing instrument throughout my teaching career, and to have shared it with so many. This process honors both sides of the art making process, and that it is in seeing our own vulnerability, that makes us strongest, so that we may cross the bridge when we come to it

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Aesthetic & Pedagogical Compasses:
The Self in Motion

Aesthetic & Pedagogical Compasses: The Self In Motion

Liora Bresler

Abstract

This is a story of composing and being composed by “Aesthetics and curriculum”, a course I taught for 28 years at the University of Illinois. The course aimed at living with questions, as Rilke famously suggested, rather than seeking ultimate answers; heightened experience, wonder and exploration rather than mastery; creating openings rather than pre-destined knowledge. Tuning inward and outward were complementary processes that supported each other in a dynamic conversation involving artworks, the self, and aesthetic theories. We learned about ourselves in the process of encountering artworks and aesthetic theories, and, in turn, the encounter with our individual selves was crucial to the understanding of artwork and aesthetic theories. The aspiration to connect, to open ourselves to how artwork can expand us, rather than mastering it, built on Martin Buber’s notion of “I-Thou”.

This is a story of composing and being composed by “Aesthetics and curriculum” (C & I 581), a course I taught for 28 years at the University of Illinois. The course aimed at living with questions, as Rilke famously suggested, rather than seeking ultimate answers; heightened experience, wonder and exploration rather than mastery; creating openings rather than pre-destined knowledge. Tuning inward and outward were complementary processes that supported each other in a dynamic conversation involving artworks, the self, and aesthetic theories. We learned about ourselves in the process of encountering artworks and aesthetic theories, and, in turn, the encounter with our individual selves was crucial to the understanding of artwork and aesthetic theories. The aspiration to connect, to open ourselves to how artwork can expand us, rather than mastering it, built on Martin Buber’s notion of “I-Thou” (Buber, 1971.)

Opening, to artworks, to aesthetic theories, to our selves, is not to be rushed. It requires that we stay with the process and give it time so that what we encounter can speak to us. The prolonged engagement (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) that is acknowledged to cultivate fresh perception, observation, and conceptualization in qualitative research is equally essential in the journey of aesthetics, going beyond formal knowledge and artistic skills to a connected inquiry (Bresler, 2006).

In C&I 581 teaching and learning were intertwined. I was the one composing the syllabus and deciding on reading materials, framing key questions for classes and assignments and facilitating discussions. I shaped this course, and the course shaped me, in a process of dynamically changing teaching and self reminiscent of Escher's (1948) self-referential hand drawing (<https://moa.byu.edu/m-c-eschers-drawing-hands/>) (Bresler, 2008). It was the students who brought the theories, themes and issues to life, taking the buffet of artistic experiences and readings to their own corners of the world with emergent meaning. Reminded of Parker Palmer's claim that "We teach who we are" (Palmer, 1998), I realize now that we also *become* what we teach. This class helped launch me to the next stage of my life, with the arts continuing to be a profoundly wise teacher.

Composing the course involved an interplay of moving back and forth between pedagogical and aesthetic compasses. I encountered the concept of compassing in the work of narrative, folklore, and children's literature researcher Betsy Hearne. In *A Narrative Compass* (Hearne, 2009), Hearne refers to stories that inspire and shape professional identity. Inviting my students, mostly pre- and in-service teachers, to tune to their own compasses through responses to their chosen and prescribed artworks and theories that offered divergent, sometimes conflicting understandings of art, we aimed towards teaching styles that were tuned to their own compasses and commitments.

Shifts in teaching paradigms: Artistic and pedagogical

Courses, like people, are shaped by disciplinary as well as personal contexts, including those practices that vex our sensitivities and values. In my earlier role as a piano teacher in Israel, I aimed to redress what was lacking in my own formal piano lessons, a sense of ownership and voice. While I strove to connect my students to the music they played, my teaching stayed within the hard boundaries of classical music (Detels, 1999), essentially giving little space for their voices through improvisation or composition. In the tradition of classical music, my repertoire-centered teaching emphasized skill and mastery, performing this Bach Fugue and that Beethoven piano sonata; analyzing forms and appreciating the intricacies of recurrent motifs, changing keys, and the dynamic forms and harmonies of a piece. Here, the knowledge revolved around mastery of musical pieces aiming to combine technical skills with a mind/heart expressivity.

Teaching music theory at the Open University was different in that it emphasized the abstraction of concepts. Following the textbook provided by the university, I taught the framework for Western music from Baroque to late Romanticism and beyond, including modes, harmonic progressions, and the architectural structure of the circle of fifths with its inner logic and intricate relationships. I enjoyed both kinds of teaching, connecting with the type of knowledge they represented as part of my identity of a performer, music theorist, and a musicologist.

My subsequent position of directing musical concerts at the Tel-Aviv Museum allowed me to branch out to a broader experience and understanding of education. Composing concert seasons and curating spaces for musical experiences included auditioning soloists and chamber ensembles and writing repertoire-centered program notes that alerted audiences to musical style and form, contextualizing the performed pieces in the composer's life and historical events of the time. My emerging interests in crossing artistic disciplines[1]-- music, visual arts, theater, dance -- led me to initiate concert series with lectures by university professors in History, Arts History, and Musicology that presented big ideas and values manifested in different artistic media.

Curating aesthetic spaces that bridged artistic disciplines would re-emerge years later in the design of the Aesthetics and Curriculum course.

The shift of teaching paradigms was initiated when I left the identity of a musician and musicologist, moving from Israel to Stanford, California and embarking on a degree in Education with a focus on arts and aesthetic education. Though the transition felt abrupt, I now recognize the presence of aesthetics and a commitment to education broadly conceived, regarding the arts as heightened experiences and rich spaces for inquiry, evident in my museum work. In my first research assignment with Elliot Eisner, tasked with writing a case-study of an elementary school class and confronted with my lack of knowledge in the fields of curriculum and qualitative research, I conceptualized the curriculum of that class as I would a musical piece, attending to its temporal form, rhythm, orchestration, melody, counterpoint and dynamics. It was then that I realized the (implicit) lessons of performance and music theory, teaching me to tune into temporal reality – the reality of classrooms that underlie all personal and social experience--attending to its inherent rhythms, forms, dynamics and harmonies (Bresler, 2019.) This conceptualization alerted me to the wisdom of musical dimensions underlying educational processes and, as importantly, the personal voice and interpretive possibilities of qualitative inquiry.[2]

The readings I encountered in Eisner's class – Leo Tolstoy, John Dewey, Suzanne Langer—were different from my experience of the aesthetic readings featured in my earlier Philosophy courses in Tel-Aviv University, -- dry and disconnected from my life. Being introduced in Nel Noddings' class to Martin Buber's notion of relationship with art and the world (Buber, 1971) was animating and generative. Grounded in my new experiences of educational and social science (rather than musicological and archival) research, I perceived how Dewey and Buber were intimately connected to daily life and grappling with how to live meaningfully. The vibrancy of these ideas was essential in shaping aspirations for C&I 581.

Another formative body of knowledge that shaped the Aesthetic and Curriculum class were the worlds of arts education, a near yet incongruous relative to classical music and arts. Arts education is embedded within the larger domain of formal schooling and its distinct cultures, including its traditions of curricula, pedagogies, and evaluation. Learning about arts education and its contexts through courses as well as through research projects at Stanford and later Illinois made the strange (arts education) familiar and at the same time, rendered the familiar art worlds that continued to be my home strange, their normalcy less of a given.

Hired by the department of Curriculum and Instruction at the University of Illinois to teach aesthetic education, I titled my course "Aesthetic foundations of education". After all, that was what drew me to educational research and education. When told that courses titled "foundation" were the domain of our philosophy of education department I changed the course title to "Aesthetics and curriculum", with the understanding of curriculum as a path broadly interpreted. That course, and other courses on arts and education that I developed and taught at Illinois[3], revolved around my fascination with what the arts could do for us when we allow them to speak to us. I recognized the power of aesthetic theories to pose compelling questions and tune our attention to encounters with art, and also the centrality of the voice of the self to conduct a dynamic conversation between specific artwork and theories.

If the curation of artistic experiences at the Tel-Aviv Museum was an early harbinger of this course, an important support for the focus on experience was my encounter with Buddhism. Five days after I deposited my dissertation in June 1987 I treated myself to a five-day silent Vipassana retreat. The inquiry-based, experiential foundation of mindfulness and the notion of a self that is fluid, interconnected with situations and encounters, made sense. The Buddhist recommendation that we remain present and curious about what we encounter rather than resist it--that is, that we learn from it--resonated with my credo about the arts. The caution about holding tightly to ideologies of any kind, including aesthetic ideologies, was a useful one. The process of integrating these teachings with my thinking and being was gradual. However, the recognition that both mindfulness and the arts facilitate a space of contemplating experience rather than being submerged by it inspired a cultivation of awareness that encompassed cognition and affect, mindful of the different senses.

Extended spaces for encounter with aesthetic relationships, allowing these relationships to unfold, was crucial. I realized that slowing down, and dedicating time for an encounter, honored both the art and the class as beholders in the journey of vitality and growth. It is when we are willing to stay with the questions (Rilke, 1997), when we are willing to encounter dimensions of our inner being (London, 1989, 1), “to fathom not only “what’s out there” but “what’s in here” (London, 1989, 17), when we are in a state of a “lingering caress” and “mutual absorption” (Armstrong, 2000), when we relax from the need to make sense (Biesta, 2013), that the world can address us. The readings of Rilke, London, Armstrong, and Biesta came years after I started teaching this class. Here, teaching came first, generating awareness and articulation. Only then was I able to greet those big ideas by Rilke, London, Armstrong and Biesta as kindred companions.

Extended spaces came in different forms and shapes. I always started my first class with presenting an artwork and going in a circle (multiple circles) to elicit responses to guided questions. The art varied--from figurative to abstract, from Renaissance Breughel to 20th century Rousseau, and Klee and contemporary Terry Barrett and Botero--but the key questions stayed the same. They progressed from descriptive (“What do you see?”) through active and playful (“What would you remove from this picture?” or “Enter the picture, where will you be? What will you be able to observe from there?”). They ranged from interpretive/synthesizing (“title the picture”) to dialogical/phenomenological (“what do you say to the picture, what does it say to you?”). The richness of students’ perspectives and responses enabled us as a group to see more. Listening often allowed me to expand my own perceptions in ways I couldn’t do on my own. It was the ability to listen to the artwork, listen to other students, and relate to their responses contrapuntally that made for a complex, multifaceted encounter with the artwork, complemented by art history and art appreciation resources. Recognizing the importance of listening to peers, I encouraged referring to others’ contributions in both class discussion and in papers by “counting” it towards the grade, just as referring to a reading did.

While the concept of *respect* (e.g. for artwork and for others’ opinions) is a useful starting point, I have always perceived it as cool, polite, more dutiful than engaged, indeed, a starting rather than end point. The focus on sharing personal observations of artworks with depth and honesty, acknowledging individual contexts that affect interpretations, is more conducive to relationship. The differences of perspectives and interpretations testified to the power of art to expand dialogues.

Other “slow spaces” included assigning students to explore Krannert Art Museum, identify artworks that “called them,” and spend 40 minutes of immersion, close observation and inner dialogue with each; to attend dance and theater performances with follow-up class discussions, often with guest presenters, mostly creators of these performances, before or after the event; and to write lengthy individual papers after each encounter as space to explore and articulate insights. The focus was not on developing skills or mastering information. Rather, it was the grounded cultivation of diverse aesthetic sensibilities and attempt to communicate them through language, an impossible task, but one that carries tremendous educational opportunities. The artistic events ranged in genres, formal and expressive qualities, and traditions, from classic or cutting-edge dance, theater and music to ethnic and folk performances. The Black Violin concert exemplified emerging hybrids of classical and rock. Attending to African and Latino performances, being introduced to Islamic and Japanese gardens and tea ceremony, sensitized us to rich cultural sensibilities and traditions. Humperdinck’s Hansel and Gretel opera connected to the arts of children’s books and fairy tales. Visits by eminent creators and artists, from choreographers Ralph Lemon, Jan Erkert, and Mark Morris, to visual artists Billy Jackson, Kimiko Gunji, and Stacey Robinson, poet and author/scholar Betsy Hearne, violinist Daniel Heifetz and members of the Sphinx Orchestra with their Founder Aaron Dworkin, and master educators Kimber Andrews, Koji Matsunobu, Patricia Pinciotti, Anne Sautman, Eve Harwood, and Jean Korder expanded our perspectives on what it may mean to inquire, to be engaged, as a creator, performer, communicator, and educator in the broader sense of the word. We realized what could be gained by giving artwork the respect of time and attention.

Along with attending to highly sophisticated art at the reverent, distinctive spaces of Krannert Performing Center and the Art Museum, the aim was to bring a heightened aesthetic perception to everyday life. Heightened perception of the everyday needs cultivation. All too often, as John Dewey observed, the common act of recognition hinders perception. “Recognition” Dewey wrote, “is perception arrested before it has the chance to develop freely” (1934, 52).[4] The ordinary, British Philosopher Peter de Bolla remarks, is often too close for attention, extraordinary in its ability to go unremarked. The everyday has an “uncanniness of . . . proximity,” to slip *behind* attention (de Bolla, 2001, 64). It is as if, in order to survive a bombardment of stimuli, we need to construct a mode of inattention, creating a domain too close for the reach of attention. The “aesthetic habit” cultivated in arts centers and the reading of poetry (for example, Pablo Neruda’s “Ode to Socks” and Mary Oliver’s “Can You Imagine”) supports perception in everyday life. Our communal eating where each of us took turns bringing food, practical in a 3-hour class, was accompanied by generating nuanced descriptions of tastes and the visual, textural, and gastronomic qualities of the food that aimed to include all the senses in a comprehensive understanding of aesthetics.

These experiences heightened the realization that classes are always embodied, characterized by distinct choreographies (Bresler, 2004), evoking interest in felt sense. There is considerable movement even in the most restrictive classes. Students interact with their laptops or notebooks, raise their hands, walk to the board, go to the bathroom, and help the teacher distribute materials, including, in our class, food. The “null requirement” in this class of *not* using cell phones unless in an emergency situation, contributed, I believed, to a heightened concentration. In addition to these instrumental aspects of class choreography, we used the body for expressive purposes, integrating movement as part of somatic explorations.

In these processes, course readings applied to the grounded and the personal. Knowledge about art can shape and expand perception and experience, or not. Depending on the nature of the art encountered, knowledge often came after an initial personal dialogue, for example, at the art museum or in class, with the extra time to engage. At other times knowledge came beforehand, providing a framework to facilitate the initial encounter. In an academic context where knowledge is prioritized over experience, this course aimed to cultivate personal habits of inquiry and connection (Bresler, 2006) with knowledge as supporting, but not overshadowing experience.

I used the structured mechanism of papers to make sure that people took time to reflect on the artistic experience, that the experience was core but the readings and class discussions worked in tandem. The focus was not on “liked/disliked” but on the depth of our learning from the arts and from in and out of class experiences, expanding the same descriptive, interpretive and dialogic lenses practiced in the first class. The papers were graded on depth, on evidence of personal investment in “seeing more” and understanding more, on being able to perceive nuances and become interested. My colleagues used to be puzzled that I enjoyed reading students’ papers as much as I did. I always felt richer when invited to see an artwork, often one that I might not particularly care for, or an application of an aesthetic theory, through another’s engaged vision.

The forces, pulls and pushes, in shaping a course

Most writing, I realized years ago, is generated because there is something we push against: Dewey’s notion of art as *experience* (1934), for instance, contrasted with an inert object of artwork; or Robert Solomon’s (1999) notion of philosophy as joyous compared to intellectually lifeless arguments that are a common practice are two examples. This was true for the course. What was I pushing against? The push, I discovered, was against my early experience of being taught piano in ways that created an oppressive and rigid experience. I was pushing against the dichotomy I experienced in my Philosophy degree, where the cerebral aesthetic texts felt disconnected from the vitality of life’s key questions. I was pushing against ready-made knowledge versus the mobilization of one’s whole being to draw fresh meanings out of the encounter.

It was not only academic learning that I was pushing against. My research in schools clearly pointed to the prevalent practice of arts education imitating the academic curriculum in both structures and pedagogies (Bresler, 1994); and to the practice of the arts as subservient to academic knowledge (Bresler, 1995). “Making art” in schools was too often about surface engagement rather than a space to connect (though not always--there were inspiring exceptions in all arts disciplines). The notion that the arts in school systems could and should connect much more vibrantly and personally was particularly urgent in teaching Masters Certification students in the College of Education for whom this course became a requirement in the mid 1990s.[5] Quite a few of these graduate students had no background or interest in the arts. When structuring artistic encounters, I hoped for experiences that students could connect to their own voices and expand their visions of who they wanted to be. Interestingly, I recognized that this aspiration was also apt for those masters and doctoral students from the School of Art and Design and the School of Music who had extensive experience in their chosen art discipline but often little experience with other arts.

Every teacher has an age-group focus, whether it’s kindergarten, fifth, or high school junior. Every teacher teaches in a specific context. Each level and context come

with their demands and expertise. As part of my research projects I had the opportunity of observing diverse settings and age levels, from early childhood, to elementary and secondary, from urban to rural, from ordinary to exceptional. Still, my own setting and expertise centered in higher education with the specific communities of students I had. We discussed in class what aesthetic and artistic experiences could mean for different age groups, in different settings and circumstances; we recognized that there were no recipes that would hold across all contexts. Aspiring for meaningful connections between teacher, students and aesthetic experiences implies relationships that are open, tuned and investigational. The students in C & I 581, in their present and future roles as teachers, would be engaged in a continuous process of navigation to adapt contents and pedagogies meaningful to them and to their own present and future communities.

Buddhist scholar and teacher Stephen Batchelor observes that “The artist’s dilemma and the meditator’s are, in a deep sense, equivalent. Both are repeatedly willing to confront an unknown and to risk a response that they cannot predict or control. Both are disciplined in skills that allow them to remain focused on their task and to express their response in a way that will illuminate the dilemma they share with others.” (Batchelor, 1997). This observation, I believe, is equally true for teachers. Providing some ideas and some skills for the students in this course was useful. More fundamental was setting us all on a path of unfolding teaching and learning through encounters and queries, and a taste of the joy of possible expansions through venturing into the unknown. This was highlighted in the first, prolonged encounter with the art, with no information on the art presented, where the focus was intensified perception of artwork and other students’ responses, and where my own role was responding and improvising based on students’ responses to model an interchange that is based on attentiveness rather than preconceived knowledge. The inclusion of guest speakers opened me as much as my students to novel, firsthand vistas of relationship with arts, including the expression of struggle in terms of race and what these struggles meant to artists; or our classroom participation in movement exercises that were out of my skills and expertise and proved as transformative for me as they were for the students.

On a fundamental level, I was astounded that I enjoyed teaching aesthetics as much as I did. I recognized that no matter how extensively I read, my knowledge of the vast and evolving aesthetic and arts education field was painfully limited. I delighted in the genuine, conversational nature of classes, where students assumed the role of playmates. Related surprises were about the consistent expansion of seeing that happened through giving an artwork time, whether attending to it as a maker or as a viewer. Just as the Fox advised the Little Prince (Saint Exupery, 1943), it is the time you invest in something that creates a relationship. This advice is consistent with Buber’s notion of I-Thou, highlighting the genuine encounter that touches and transforms. In teaching this class for nearly 30 years, using some of the same questions and some of the same readings applied to different students’ communities and performances, the encounters felt fresh and recharging inviting me to develop my own seeing and understanding. I recognized a relationship that I came to think of a “three-pronged relationships” (Bresler, 2013): intensifying relationships to the artwork through students’ eyes, and at the same time intensifying relationships to the students through sharing an artwork.

The next stage: Aesthetic foundations of life

What I wished for my students became my own most profound learning. I learned in this course that our teacher and learner selves can merge, that I can continue to work with the teaching of life and respond in my own classroom of one through awareness, expression, and creation. This Aesthetics and curriculum class deepened my experience in recognizing the vitality of an “unknowing” mindset (Bresler, 2019). The experience of not knowing, as both a teacher and a learner, supported my move to the emerging next stage of my “Adulthood II” (Bateson, 2010), a second kind of adulthood that aspires toward wisdom and, for me, is invigorated by a different, gentler and deepened kind of energy.

I was enriched by teaching C&I 581 for nearly 30 years, with the special companionship of wholehearted, committed students, teachers, and the guest presenters/artists who contributed to these classes. Lessons from the course have followed me into a present stage of expanding my voice through new forms of creation and taking education beyond formal institutions into emerging life journeys. I draw, from my teaching experience, a foundational triangle that includes nurturing structures and sequences that invite open-endedness and emergence, shared by a community of engaged artists-explorers. These excursions draw on my beginnings, those left many years ago, with improvisations on the piano, as well as those (still) beloved Israeli folksongs, and venturing into hybrid forms of classical-cum-improvisation. My emerging directions increasingly involve visual explorations with an interplay of colours, images, and writing—all reaching *out* and *in* to uncharted landscapes, guided by an inner compass tuned to aesthetics and wisdom.

Endnotes

[1] Manifested in my master thesis in musicology, conducted at the same time (Bresler, 2016)

[2] I continued to grapple with “lessons from music” (2005), curious about additional teachings from music and the arts, including the attunement that happens in both chamber music and open-ended interviews, and the sense of improvisation that is generated by this attunement. Attunement and improvisation proved central in teaching the Aesthetics and Curriculum class.

“Arts in elementary and early childhood”, and “Arts education in international settings”

[3] “Arts in elementary and early childhood”, and “Arts education in international settings”

[4] For an elaboration of this point, see, Higgins, 2007.

[5] The course had no requirement for previous arts background.

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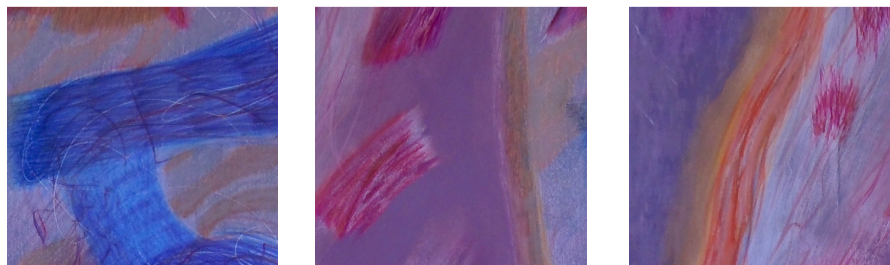
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Do Teachers Know This?

David Pike

Abstract

A Communication Arts instructor in a Calgary Technical Institute discovers an opportunity to enlarge his vocation when a student asks him a simple four-word question. Methods of thinking and learning are soon integrated into the communications curriculum, and students, together with their instructors, are invited to develop more and better “TLC” capabilities as they study and practice their chosen disciplines. The article closes by suggesting, given the challenges we’re facing in working, learning, and living well together now, that we ask leaders in our communities and beyond the same question; and to encourage them to expand their leadership roles and the roles of the people they lead, focusing less on *what* to think, learn, and communicate, and more on *how*.

I started my mid-life career in college teaching in the late summer of 1981 when I was 33 by interviewing for the position of Communication Arts Instructor at the Southern Alberta Institute of Technology in Calgary, Alberta, Canada. Since I had recently married and become the step-father of two young children, I was happily focused on finding satisfying work and settling down. Heading to the far north, as I had every summer of the 70’s as a Geodetic Survey Foreman mapping the Canadian arctic during my extended studies in Geography and English Literature at Queen’s University, was no longer the attractive gig it was when I was solo.

Back home after my interview, my partner asked how things went. “Well,” I said semi-confidently, “I expected to be asked about my practically non-existent methods and experiences of teaching, but the department head saw Yukon in my CV and asked if I’d encountered any bears and I said yes and away we went. He asked what happened, and I told them about having to shoot two that came into our tents. “What did you do with them?” he asked. “Well, the ranger in Dawson City who had cleared us to shoot them if necessary, radioed that we had to skin them, and I said we’re surveyors, not bear skinners, and he said the fine for failing to preserve a pelt is \$600, so I skinned the bears and our camp man bundled the pelts up and drove them down the Dempster Highway to his office and...”. Sorry, but the department head kept probing for more details and... well, I think they’re going to offer me the job because I worked in the arctic and skinned bears: good qualifications for teaching tech students I guess. A faculty member on the interview panel seemed to sense she should ask me something about teaching and wondered if I’d be introducing students of say Nuclear Medicine or Automotive Technology to poetry. I said no which was the right answer given that every course in SAIT’s 60 programs that I surveyed before my interview was 100% practical.

Fast forward a few years: how was I faring in my new career? I was probably good enough but clearly not the greatest, getting by on some “tips for teachers” and avoiding the kinds of pitfalls my own least talented teachers and professors fell into. I still remember one student’s sardonic evaluation of my first term teaching efforts:

Q: How could this instructor improve his or her performance?

A: Speak English.

Ouch. But fair enough. After wondering if I was supposed to use one syllable words I figured out that I could add a synonym or embed a definition whenever I used uncommon words.

The courses I was assigned were narrowly focused on basic skills. While I liked the challenge of convincing the 35 or so mature students in each of my 5 courses per semester that communication skills were just as important as the technical skills they’d signed up for—sometimes even *more so*—the mountain of marking was exhausting. And I was beginning to realize that the *training* that I was hired to do seemed less interesting and less valuable in the long run than the *educating* I presumed we could and should also be doing along the way.

When I began introducing writing and oral presentation assignments that required students to read, think critically, and accurately represent, for example, the thesis and supporting evidence in an editorial, few could do this. Instead of the objective analysis I had requested, after demonstrating with examples, they submitted reactions and personal opinions. They were shocked when I pointed out that their submissions weren’t what the instructions specified. In their minds, their personal opinions trumped everything. It became clear to me and some of my colleagues that two more arts — the art of thinking and the art of learning—needed to be developed simultaneously alongside the art of communicating or we weren’t going to be accomplishing much.

So the TLC initiative (Thinking, Learning, and Communicating across the curriculum) was launched and a few of us began facilitating free extracurricular workshops through the Learning Skills Centre on better methods of reading-to-learn, note-making, remembering, focusing and managing attention, self-testing, using critical and constructive thinking frames to analyse arguments, solve problems, meet challenges, collaborate, and so on. And that’s when, during the break in one of my workshops, a participant who I remember as being in his late thirties, like me, approached me and said, “This is interesting stuff, David. Do teachers know this?”

“Do teachers know this?!”

Holy Cow. I don’t remember his name and he wouldn’t have any idea how much that simple little four-word question turned me towards a wider vocation than the calling that one of my grandfathers, both of my parents, many of my uncles and aunts, some of my best friends and, historically, many millions of others had answered before me. I think I babbled something about how most of us are hired primarily as subject matter experts (SMEs) and that we were expected to become teaching and learning experts (TLEs) over time by seeking feedback from our students, by consulting with our colleagues about best practices, and by attending regular professional development sessions.

But even as I was speaking, the needle on my Hemingway-recommended, built-in, shock-proof bullshit detector was jumping to life: I was failing to believe what I was saying. He'd just illuminated a major problem with post-secondary teaching: we tend to put our investments in our own PD in updating and extending our *subject matter expertise* and too often, according to student evaluations, our teaching and learning expertise is weak or missing in action. "Knows his/her stuff but..."

And how do the half of us who fall below the mid-point on student evaluations of the quality of teaching at our colleges and universities respond? Many no doubt endeavor to do better; however, some claim that students aren't qualified to evaluate, or that the instrument isn't valid, or that their rigorousness makes them unpopular, or that their job isn't to be liked. And so the gaps between their teaching and their students' learning get to live another year or two. Or ten or twenty.

Fast forward a few years: inspired by our students and by exemplary educators of post-secondary educators such as K. Patricia Cross, some colleagues and I have

- Opened the Teaching & Learning Centre (TLC) with an Olympic Legacy Fund Grant
 - faculty instructional skills development by and for each other as a complement to ongoing
 - student learning skills development by faculty and student tutors in the Learning Skills Centre (LSC)
- Used the TLC as a springboard for piloting
 - Instructional Skills Workshops (ISWs), experiential, peer-based 24-hour workshops
 - Facilitator Development Workshops (FDWs), for leaders of ISWs
 - Learning Styles Workshops (Kolb's LSI and Gregorc's Style Delineator)
 - Various experiential/interactive/discovery learning methods as alternatives to lecturing
 - Using Teaching Portfolios to collect the results of an individual's and/or a department's teaching innovations
- Contracted with local business & industry partners to revamp their in-house course designs and train their trainers in highly interactive, performance-based learning methods
- Worked with governments, post-secondary institutions, and corporate sponsors on international projects focused on improving teaching and learning methods in diverse countries such as Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyz Republic, Saudi Arabia, South Africa.

By 1998, when two colleagues and I had the opportunity to form our own independent educational consulting company to pursue more such stimulating development work and leave the least charming aspects of academic life behind—some of the more soul-squeezing meetings and leaders for example— we took it. And so *another* challenging and satisfying 17-year career unfolded nationally and internationally.

We were free to share what we'd been learning about better practices in curriculum design, instructional delivery, and program evaluation in careers that entailed being invited to collaborate intensely and briefly inside a wide range of distinctive, welcoming cultures.

These days, when asked if I'm retired, I say no right away and quote a woman who said, "If you say you're retired, people think you've left your brain in a park; so instead I say 'I've diversified my avocational, recreational, and volunteering activities!'" I'm reading a lot, listening to music, outfitting a cabin, facilitating workshops for hospice and palliative care volunteers, cavorting with grandchildren; and keeping the notebooks I've been keeping since 1968 during a first sojourn in Europe. It's my lifelong beloved method for noticing, remembering, thinking, and learning after reading and traveling or just looking out the window. The bear stories, the things students say, the questions your children ask—"Do plankton talk to each other?" "Do you sometimes wish you were more normal?"—are all there.

Recently I was thinking about the catalytic effect one student's simple question—"Do teachers know this?"—had on me. It's related to the question Michel de Montaigne, 16th century humanist, inventor of the essay, and hero of mine had inscribed over his door when he retired from public life at 38: *What do I know?* Another admirable, simple, skeptical question. Together it seems these two questions have continuously prompted me to respond and correspond. I seem to be doing it now.

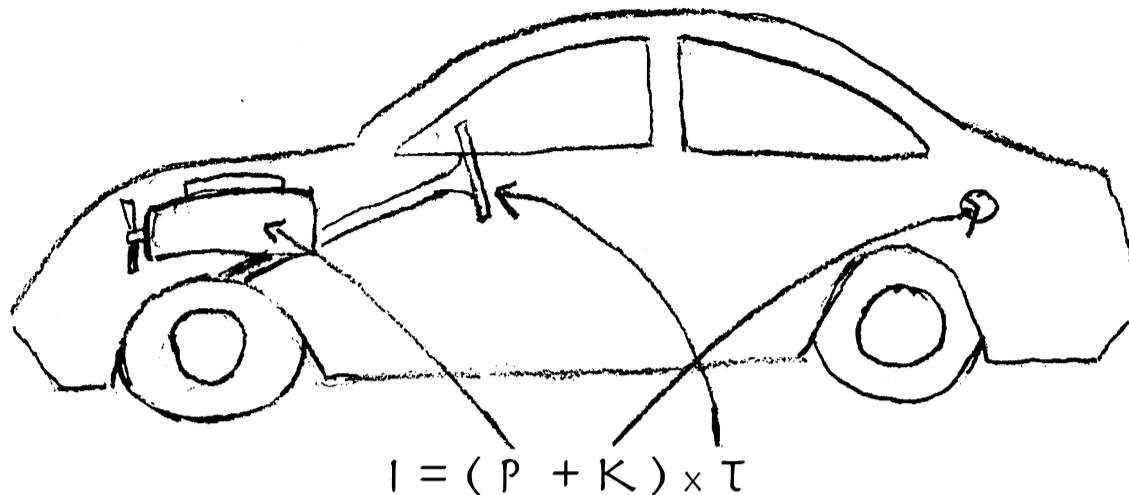
So here's a provisional answer to that *what do I know?* question: to be effective teachers or coaches or mentors, it seems we need to be more than just subject matter experts or talented practitioners of an art or a profession, passing our knowledge along. I think *we are especially the ones* who need to be actively developing the arts of thinking, learning, and communicating *in our own lives* so that we're better able to do that with others in the classrooms, studios, workplaces, and communities where we work and would like to be flourishing along with others.

Critical thinking specialists are convinced that the best way to develop intelligence is to focus at least as much if not more attention on developing *tactics* as on "covering the material" (I see a shroud being pulled over a corpse) or "delivering knowledge" (I see a truck backing up to a loading dock).

To drive this idea home, so to speak, I'll leave you with a formula, an image, and an analogy I adapted from the excellent work that critical thinking specialists Robert Ennis and Robert Sternberg have done on the question of how best to develop intelligence. I've suggested that participants draw it along with me at the end of various workshops I've facilitated. It's intended to persuade them to continue working on the teaching, learning, and critical and creative thinking tactics we'd just been practicing.

$$I = (P + K) \times T$$

Intelligence = (Power + Knowledge) x Tactics



$$I = (P + K) \times T$$

Intelligence = (Power + Knowledge) x Tactics

Drawing, 2021, copyright David Pike.

In this analogy, intelligence can be thought of as a combination of

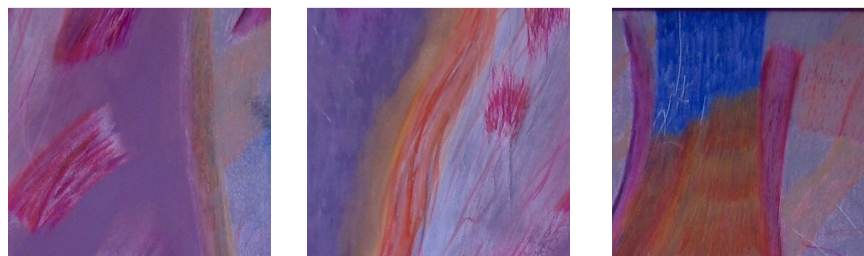
- intellectual horsepower, akin to I.Q.: its validity and developability may be a subject of debate but some forms of intelligence—e.g. facility with languages, music, or math—may be innate
- knowledge, similar to the fuel needed to power the engine: a little may take us a long way while some of us require a lot more, depending on our vehicle's design and the kind of trip we're taking
- & tactics: how you steer, accelerate, and brake your vehicle while getting it to take you successfully where you want to go.

In this formula, tactics can *multiply* whatever intellectual horsepower and knowledge you have been born with or acquired. The analogy has the added bonus of helping us understand why a high I.Q. and a great deal of knowledge don't necessarily take you where you want to go if you're not very good at steering or reversing course. Entrepreneurs are famously good tacticians (This was recognized by a University president who told a gathering of new faculty members he was always nice to his 'A' students because some would come back as colleagues; and he was especially nice to his 'D' students because some would go on to start hugely successful enterprises and donate millions of dollars).

Given the perils our world is facing now and our difficulty in coming to agreements on what to believe and what to do, I'm taking my cue from the unknown student who influenced *my* vocation and asking, "*Do leaders know this?*" Do they know how to refrain from simply announcing *what* to think, learn, and communicate and to attend instead to *how* to do these life-saving and life-enriching things. If not nearly enough of them do, then here's a great challenge for the leaders of leaders to take on.

Author Biography

David Pike has worked as a surveyor in the Canadian Arctic, as a communication arts instructor at the Southern Alberta Institute of Technology, then as the first coordinator of its Teaching and Learning Centre before turning to independent educational consulting and workshop facilitation locally and in developing countries. Currently he volunteers in hospice and palliative care, conducts workshops for new volunteers, and makes regular entries in a book he's been writing for some years—okay, 55—called *Notebooks of an Amateur Human Being*. He has an M.A. In English Literature from Queen's University in Kingston, Ontario. Contact davidlornepike@gmail.com



A Story Without End...

Holly Edwards

Abstract

This article traces the impact of 9/11 on my teaching style as an art historian. That trauma has left its marks on all of us, and yet life goes on. My own ‘story’ ranges across time and space, from Kabul decades ago through years in the studio since then. The tale is punctuated with contemplative questions about the therapeutic role of art in a troubled world. Art matters! And the way that we teach it makes a difference by fostering mindfulness in students with interdisciplinary pedagogical techniques, asking them to look, read, make, and talk collaboratively in order to transcend collective suffering.

A long time ago, on a normal, everyday day, I was frantically pawing through drawers of slides to assemble a lecture about Islamic architecture for an undergraduate art history class. It looked like this: I would grab slide after slide, laying them out on my light table, anxiously hoping that a clear argument would shine through the glass, despite my own murky thinking. If I moved too fast, I might forget to replace a slide with a cardboard marker in the file drawer, thereby incurring the wrath of the slide librarian. I had to be careful. It was early in the fall semester and I was scrambling to launch a career and a new course.

And what did creativity have to do with it? At the time, mainstream art history was a memory game of masterpieces--names, dates, and evolving styles. Europe was the center of ‘culture’, and painting and sculpture were the crowning glories of the tradition. Contextualizing iconic works of art at the moment of their production was a sleuthing operation that involved unpacking history and unveiling meaning. Students were expected to learn canonical artifacts and follow in the footsteps of the experts in an institutionalized discipline. Admittedly, it was a bit more complicated than that for me because I had wandered into the “non-Western” sphere, living for a while in Afghanistan and then doing research in Pakistan. For me, original fieldwork on medieval shrine architecture in the Indus Valley involved a blue jeep, on-site sketching, and lots of photographs. The history of art was (and still is) going global and it remains a fascinating and challenging adventure.

But in that slide room a long time ago, the studious silence was suddenly replaced by gasps and murmurs. News of planes colliding with the World Trade Centers had just erupted. What was going on??

I have no idea what I taught that day. Time and space had come to a standstill and my memory froze, only to be triggered randomly thereafter. Much has been written about those events and the heart-stopping images of planes, flames, fumes...and bodies. Psychologists, spiritual counselors, and social workers helped innumerable people subsequently suffering from PTSD and the story did not end. A decade later, operatives setting out from Afghanistan assassinated Osama bin Laden in Pakistan. That place was familiar territory for me also, and as the millennium unfolded, other conflicts proliferated in the Middle East. Museums and monuments were destroyed in Iraq; it seemed that the “history of art” was being obliterated. I was safely distant but emotionally entangled, ostensibly knowledgeable and yet deeply confused... What was my “job” in such circumstances?

Teaching English in Kabul had enabled me to connect deeply with others. Heading to work every day down Chicken Street was a wonderful wander among carpet dealers, book sellers, and kabob shops. Though a short walk, it offered me life-long learning, thanks to kind, generous, and loving people. It was a *real* education that vastly overshadowed the subsequent PhD. But shortly after I left, the Russians invaded and everything changed. Afghanistan has been a site of conflict and tragedy ever since, subject to seemingly intractable political and religious polarization. As that agonizing story continues to unfold in the general terrain of the monotheism, how shall we think about the relationship between art and the sacred? Where does power really lie?

And now, with the anniversary of 9/11, memories surface and tough questions plague. Surely we have the means to shape the world anew, but is military force necessary to do so? Can people ever set down weaponry to address collective needs collaboratively? There is certainly pain in life; can we metabolize it with creative action? And where does art figure in the turmoil?

In search of answers, I often take refuge in the studio. Making things, after all, is generative in myriad ways though it does not always result in museum-worthy products. Inspired by Peter London, I engage mindfully with nature and let it work on me. Listening, looking, smelling, feeling, making, and just *being* can foster trust, hope, and curiosity. Doing so is not a linear process, but rather a slow spiral of growth, often unconscious. Amazing things can happen in the company of trees!

Along the way, the art historian in me has evolved even as the discipline itself has morphed. When I am teaching, I seldom begin with canonical objects, terms, or assumptions, but rather range more widely across visual culture, from the production to the reception of diverse artifacts. After all, one person’s joy is another person’s quandary and student input here is critical. When I work in museums, I often pose questions about appropriation and destruction, but ultimately, the agency of ‘things’ among living, breathing humans is the real issue.

Any ‘thing’ that outlives generations of makers and users, winning enshrinement enroute, certainly deserves attention. But why is old, damaged or fragmentary stuff deemed frame-able, valuable, and teach-able for future generations? And what happens when a work of “art” is digitally shared? Answers are elusive. Narrating the potency of material artifacts over time is what ‘art history’ is, but it gets complicated as the boundaries between self and other, here and there, now and then blur. We are living at a technologically-accelerated pace and we are *all* curators now, cameras in hand. Images proliferating

online wield the *power to over-power* in the global arena and those images constitute the lingua franca among people, cultures, and nations. So what qualifies as fluency in such a flooded and often disembodied visuality? And how can we foster such skills to advance peace and understanding? In what follows, I share my own approach, as it has emerged over time and in life's spaces between seeing and making.

When art stops you in your tracks, and makes you question what you have previously trusted, that is instructive and even transformative. Art can also affirm intuition or recalibrate despair. In my opinion, art effectively wields *revelatory* potential and that bears serious scrutiny as we endlessly shape the world anew by what we choose to view or disregard. So I invite students to identify an image or artifact or building that exerts that power palpably, freezing them to the core for whatever reason. Perhaps a past anxiety is comforted, perhaps sheer beauty inspires wonder, or perhaps strange imagery simply defies understanding. That embodied experience effectively erases time and space, postponing analysis, not unlike trauma. And what about the memory of the first encounter? Is it equally forceful?

To gain further understanding, I ask students to draw what they see, even if they resist or claim inadequate skills. Mark-making fosters somatic engagement and demands close looking. Thus, the learning goes deeper. Finally, I challenge them to articulate the power of that chosen piece in collaboration with classmates. One's own experience will always differ from that of others, and the exchange is inevitably horizon-broadening. Along the way, we contextualize the work in art historical terms, to learn the motivation of long-gone makers and the needs of subsequent viewers; the voices of teachers and museum professionals infiltrate and enrich the process as well. My hope is that all of this enables students to see the world more clearly and then re-fresh it mindfully, transcending the past, creating the present, and imagining the future. Again I credit Peter London, who taught me that art enriches consciousness, acting as mirror, lens and sieve (London, 2021), thereby preparing us for the next stage of life whatever that might be.

Self, after all, is the site from which we can view, make, love, and live with integrity and honor. There, real power lies. Studio spaces are where precious things are shaped, called forth from the human heart and kneaded by the careful hand. Those products are discussed in classrooms and enshrined in museums, often grand buildings of awe-inspiring stability. People come and go around those centers of gravity, and shared experience surfaces, generating community one step at a time. Put simply, art matters! But that is not a great revelation. It is simply a story that has no end...

Reference

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Author Biography

Holly Edwards has spent her career employed as an historian of Islamic art at Williams College. Her publications encompass a wide range of topics including American Orientalism, medieval shrine architecture in the Indus Valley, and photographs of Afghan women. Her studies with Peter London have transpired in the context of art-making workshops at Kripalu, with the result that her home now includes a very messy studio. Now she leads an independent artists group in conjunction with ongoing scholarly activities.

Acknowledgements and Dedication

This article is warmly dedicated to Peter London, whose books, wisdom, and personal advice have guided me for decades. My gratitude and awe are simply boundless. He has taught me and so many people to draw close to nature, to be mindful of self, and to see others more clearly. What a gift he is to the world in these challenging times!



Fashion, Identity, & The Muslim-American Narrative

Shireen Soliman

Abstract

In this pivotal time, assumptions, boundaries, power structures and relationships within society are being reconsidered and reimagined. My research project, “Fashion, Identity and the Muslim- American Narrative” builds off of well-established prior models and responds to this moment. Through this multidisciplinary, multimedia design workshop series geared towards Muslim American female adolescents, we are able to leverage the powerful intersection of design, technology, community, social media and social justice. In this affirming, enlightening space, we use fashion, dress and personal narrative as the springboard and means of exploring the intrinsic connection between social and emotional issues surrounding identity development, social justice and female empowerment.

Through the lens of fashion (an easily accessible and universal touch point for engagement), students are guided through the process of self and peer reflection, examining how dress directly reflects systems of thought, power and constructed norms. Through a safe, familiar environment consisting of peers and a fellow Muslim woman at the helm (often a first-time experience for many), students develop relationships and feel seen while expressing stories about how we navigate public vs. private spheres (especially relevant in the new virtual frontiers of social media and video conferencing). Participants acquire the relevant vocabulary and make direct connections about how vital their voices are as storytellers.

Through this workshop model, young Muslim women are offered the opportunity to look deeper, to consider the core aspects of their intersectional identities and most critically, how they choose to be in the world while being authentic and true to themselves and their heritage. Through low- stakes experimentation of styling, fashion design explorations and visual curation in a safe environment, students find the inspiration and confidence to be brave in the face of the complex landscape of the post-911, post-Covid, post-BLM future.

Introduction

When the world was plunged into quarantine in the Spring of 2020, the seemingly mundane, daily, universal experience of standing in front of the closet, facing the perennial question: "What to wear?" was forever changed. The task of preparing to face the world had been fundamentally transformed. How we engaged with the world shifted from sharing physical spaces at work, school, and a host of possible events, to deciding how to navigate the virtual world from behind a screen.

New questions arose: To turn on the camera or not? What to wear? Pajamas and leggings or a favorite dress or sweater (from a former life)? What constitutes the redefined public sphere? When home also becomes the workplace, class, and lounge, how do we navigate and create these new boundaries? How do we perceive and present ourselves and our space, both collectively or as an individual? How do we establish the new rules, the new relationship and even the very definition of what fashion means? What does modesty mean? Do we apply different rules for different audiences?

For Muslim American teenage girls, these questions have always existed, and their implications have never been taken for granted. Their dual identities and stages of development are bound up in these concerns. This endeavor is more complex: to curate identity through image and to establish connections between community and culture. At the same time, there is the will and ability to forge a new path forward as storytellers with increased visibility against a landscape of mixed messages and misconceptions. For wearers of hijab in particular, the task of navigating public versus private spaces has meant redefining what "home" represents. The private space has become public. Boundaries are more blurred than ever. For the Hijabi, does turning one's camera off suffice as the new "veil"? Does the Hijabi continue to make choices based on the perception of home as being "private" or don her hijab even in the most intimate setting of her own bedroom, where she has previously been able to remove her "layers" and be free of the public gaze?

Indeed, before Covid (the new "BC"), there had already been the powerful storytelling platform of social media, where Muslim women had, for the past few years, been forging ownership of their narratives. In large part this has meant countering the reductive Mainstream Media narrative, i.e. the oppressed, dangerous, different, inaccessible "other". Muslim women, particularly Hijabis, had leveraged the digital medium so successfully that they had, through their global visibility and the recognition of their buying power, managed to compel the intransigent, often dismissive, complacent fashion industry to carve out space on the global runway for the Modest Fashion movement to take hold.

The work of decolonizing societal norms around dress and women's bodies had already gained momentum. It has evolved through the global discourse around questioning, unpacking and unlearning Eurocentric notions. Among these are the connotations of modesty, power, sexuality, and feminism. In the era of Covid, these navigations and decisions were taking place alongside the broader conversations and urgency of the BLM protests and all interrelated, intersectional social justice movements.

The Covid crisis offered a renewed opportunity to reconsider assumptions and forge a new way of thinking about fashion, identity, narrative through the virtually shared experience of the re- envisioned art and design workshops.

The Pre-Covid backstory: Shireen as Educator, Advocate, Artist and Mother

As a part-time adjunct at two of the most prestigious fashion colleges in America, I had spent many years teaching students from across the world. My coursework centered around the considerations, theories, principles, skills, and knowledge needed to approach the challenge of using visual communication and illustration to express their evolving design language and identity as budding fashion designers. As a fashion consultant and educator, I've employed the analog, digital and time-based modes of expression for storytelling and narrative. The goal is to attach meaning and anchor stories, concepts, and vision to fashion design.

I am the first-generation daughter of immigrants. As a Muslim American woman and mother, I had, for years, understood that the ideas and content I shared with my fashion students in these elite college spaces could be instrumental in empowering and supporting young Muslim women as they grapple with identity construction and formation. Intrinsic to their development are the experiences of parsing and making sense of the multiple, often contrasting messages received from school, community, family, friends, and media.

For me, the mission of bringing these powerful concepts from the halls of higher ed to the prayer halls of mosques, was an act of aligning my worlds to my core purpose as a Muslim American woman and educator: to support equity, access and social justice through democratizing knowledge and learning.

I had already, for many years, come to find myself as a leader and powerful voice in my community as a Muslim American mother and educator. My insights were sought on strategies for various institutions and spaces to create authentic, culturally inclusive and affirming spaces to support Muslim Americans. Specifically, I served on Boards, Parent Teacher Organizations and School Leadership Teams, contributing cultural context and literacy to support multicultural events in schools and encourage family involvement especially in the aftermath of 9/11. I provided input to school districts and organizations on curricula and community offerings and lent my skills to media productions. In the wider world as a fashion professional, artist, and educator, I began exhibiting my illustrations at various shows, both through print and digital platforms in addition to serving on panels and committees. I was invited to be a judge in the first-ever Hijabi Fashion Shows with a global media audience. To this day, I continue to support community-led fashion education initiatives.

The Fashion and Identity Workshop is Born

My aim is to align my experiences and expertise while amplifying voices that for too long have been muted.

On completion of my graduate degree in Educational Leadership, I felt well prepared to create programming that responds to the challenges and potential of this culturally vibrant, politically complex, and technology-rich time. I was ready to embark on applying my knowledge, passion, and message to spaces within my own community—and the focus on adapting the content to middle through high school adolescents at a pivotal stage of identity development. Inspired by a young women's empowerment program through a nonprofit that I chair, I created the workshop model that would serve as the foundation for my future research and work. Through this nonprofit, I witnessed first-hand the powerful dynamic created as a result of young Muslim

women being offered the opportunity to connect and see themselves reflected through other Muslim women.

In these rooms of local nonprofits and neighborhood organizations and classrooms, I developed a workshop model that integrates and contextualizes the connections between fashion, self, identity, and narrative, along with reflective writing and conversation. The elements of image-making, an art-based curriculum and career development are all geared for the Muslim American teen experience. The workshops that I have piloted so far, for Muslim as well as mixed or Non-Muslim audiences, have yielded extraordinary creativity, peer collaboration, and self-reflection.

On a small scale, these workshops were usually described as transformative, affirming, and eye-opening. Many of the Muslim teen girls who I worked with shared that they had never had a Muslim American woman lead an arts-driven learning experience. They were fascinated to learn that beyond the traditional, typical menu of (immigrant) career options offered--lawyer, doctor, engineer, teacher--a career in the arts and design fields could somehow be accessible: "if she could do it, then perhaps I can, too"!

Initial Efforts

My initial workshops followed this arc of engagement:

After welcoming introductions, a lecture, lesson and demonstrations, the young Muslim women are asked to draw a "head-to-toe" fashion look that represents their identity, values, and vision. After only an hour or two, participants plunge into the task with evident enthusiasm. They sketch ideas and choose silhouettes, fabrics and colors that best reflect their identity. Hesitation gives way to curiosity and exploration. Sincere encouragement cheers on musings and risk-taking. The young women claim their ability to actively make connections between aspects of their visual language (color, form, texture, graphics) to their identities. The relief of not having to explain themselves, their experiences, or choices creates a palpable energy of sisterhood, support and power. Trust has been established. It's acceptance: being in a space where one feels understood and seen.

As the students put words to their new discoveries, I became resolved about my own:

- * I knew I wanted to grow my idea.
- * I knew I wanted to offer this uplifting space to more young Muslim women.
- * I knew I wanted to share this curriculum with fellow educators, community leaders and the fashion industry professionals who might not (probably don't) have access to hear directly from Muslim women for whom they were now tasked with designing modest garments and accessories.

I began writing grant proposals about my workshop model and even its potential as a source of vital research and data. In the White, patriarchal, elite, and Eurocentric world of academia, we had already long seen research establishing the critical role of fashion and dress in identity development. However, research or academic inquiry around Muslim women and fashion was virtually non-existent, which should come as no surprise. Even the few contributions that existed in the field were by non-Muslim researchers talking about Muslim women rather than Muslim women talking about ourselves.

I wanted to change that.

Some of my research questions were focused on how these young women navigated the boundaries of culture, religion, and gender roles. What understandings, resources, and dilemmas do they develop to embrace their intersectionality? What do educators and practitioners need to consider in creating learning spaces of equity and cultural literacy? In what ways do visual arts and collaborative learning provide value-forming that “inoculates” young people against demeaning messages?

First grant awarded! It was a new year. 2020. I was ready to facilitate my first grant-funded workshop model with a group of young Muslim women from a local Mosque group.

The Covid Crisis. Life transformed. Finding our way forward.

Fast forward to March 2020.

A Global Pandemic.

Virtually no warning, no way to prepare meaningfully.

That scheduled mosque group meeting was cancelled.

Group gatherings, travel, classes, most work, and life as we knew it, all came to a screeching halt.

We were now all trapped at home.

We were now "sheltering in place".

We were all afraid.

We were all fused to our preferred source of news, watching the unthinkable unfold.

Space and connection as we knew it would be forever changed.

That moment in front of the closet would take on new meaning.

Private became public.

The “in-person” became virtual.

Assumptions and prior ways of being, knowing and engaging...all shed to make way for the "new normal".

It was against this new Covid landscape that I was tasked with re-imaging, reconfiguring, and reshaping how I would deliver this workshop and experience via the virtual platform.

Issues around access immediately came into question.... nothing could be assumed.

Who would have access to a strong enough Wi-Fi connection?

Who would have financial access to colored pencils and paints, to printing and paper?

Who would have access to a supportive, quiet, distraction-free space?

Who would have access to the financial means needed to purchase supplies?

The art supplies, the templates, materials and intimacy of shared physical space were no longer a given.

The Virtual Workshop: Connections, Community, Resilience and Discovery

After the initial few weeks of shock and attempting to manage our collective trauma, it was time to envision a way to recreate the experience of an art-driven design workshop, suitable for students with little to no access or prior design experience but also without art supplies or access to me, to help guide the girls’ hands as they drew their looks. With so much of the overwhelming “new and different” already happening on so many levels, our goals were to create maximum ease of access, familiarity, and confidence.

My mission to democratize education and model equity took on a new sense of urgency.

As I, along with educators around the world, had already been facing the technical and pedagogical challenges of having to suddenly move from the in-person studio to the screens of Zoom, the first “aha moment” came with the realization that there was no way to directly translate the in-person classroom to the online learning experience. The virtual world posed challenges and opportunities and those of us already used to bridging multiple worlds were well suited to be able to adapt and choose how to apply the best of all experiences. We were at a pivotal juncture of moving forward and forging a new way of learning, engaging, and connecting.

I came to see that the move to online learning through the Covid crisis could offer the opportunity to leverage the powerful intersection of technology, community, social media, and social justice to offer new ways of seeing and knowing. By shifting the dynamic of design education to looking outwards for inspiration to affirming oneself as the locus of the design process, students would be able to redefine ideas of self, recognize one's agency through narrative and breed creativity through choice, accessibility, and adaptation.

Out came the virtual whiteboards with little to no learning curve, to support the ease and familiarity of dragging and dropping post-it notes to share ideas and engage in reflection that revealed shared experiences, a safe community space to heal and support, all the more resonant and crucial during those first months of the pandemic.

The major breakthrough for the workshop, though, came from the decision to shift the site of the “canvas” from paper to body, from shifting the practice of making and generating stories from depending on “art supplies” to one’s own body becoming the art in question, from the site of “professional” studio space to the intimacy of home.

Shifting the "canvas" from being external or apart from oneself to the idea of one's own body or story being the canvas and site upon which designing is emanating outwards to connect, allows us to align and affirm one's place and point of view in the collective discourse.

Exercises such as photo stories and video essays, requiring only a phone camera offered opportunities for "recognizing" and "reframing" meaning and connection. Our humble image- making and storytelling, in fact, represented a fundamental move away from looking to the traditional canon of art and design as externally dictated from remote, hierarchical Eurocentric elite powers in industry and academia. We find ourselves now looking toward embracing the personal, accessible, decolonized, fluid, experience of art and design as curated from within...through live, real-time, in-person and virtual experiences.

By mindfully attributing meaning to experiences, objects, artifact and images, the Muslim- American girls that had already been comfortably engaging with social media discovered a rich source of narrative-driven storytelling. The previously overlooked artifacts and symbols found not within museums, but in their own homes, were rediscovered. They became appreciated as the valuable holders of stories that had been generations in the making. They came to realize that those Tiktok videos and photoshoots are not just about hemming or showing off a skirt or veil; they’re about one’s choices on how to present oneself through fashion. They came to shift from a passive consumption of fashion and its “trends” and chosen prophets (ie: the

influencers) to an awareness that they, too, are a vibrant source of fashion and inspiration simply by virtue of who they are!



Image 1: Copyright Shireen Soliman 2020.

Looking forward: Impact, Significance and Vision

I’ve grown up here in the US and became a mother to two children in the post-9/11 era. I have directly faced many of the same challenges as the Muslim American teen girls that I’ve worked with. Through the lens of personal experience, of raising my own children and teaching so many others, I have grappled with making sense of, combatting, and countering the problematic, conflicting, and dangerous stereotypes and reductive images and perceptions of Muslim Americans.

It was my own daughter who ultimately came to serve as my muse. She taught me so much as I supported her through the adolescent years, grappling with identity, body image, dress, and cultural/religious identity. The post-9/11 environment amplified for teens the mixed messages of social vs. mainstream media against the backdrop of rising culture of fear, hate and misinformation.

Imagine my pride at seeing my work come full circle, when my daughter, now in college, recently shared that she has just been studying and creating algorithms to track representation in the media.

Imagine my surprise though, when asked during the workshop where they experienced negative representations of Muslim women, a couple of the younger participants responded “nowhere”!

On the Tiktok feeds of today's teens, Muslim women are fashionable, funny, approachable and relatable. However, the world beyond Tiktok awaits. My daughter, her brother, and their fellow Gen Z Muslim Americans are ready to become leaders and advocates in their own right, actively crafting their own narratives and continuing the legacy of what it is to pay forward, to be of service and share in co-creating new boundaries, norms and shared experiences.

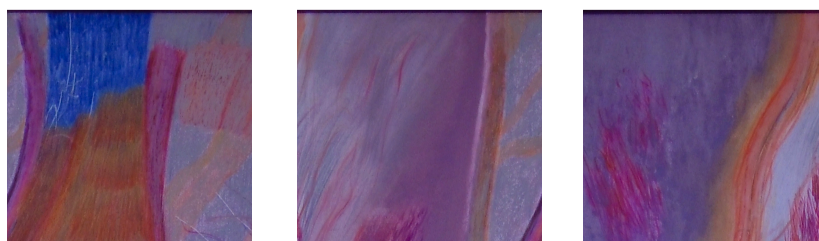
They are ready to mindfully make connections, proudly share their stories and show us the way forward. My workshop is relevant and ready to support them. The story continues...



Image 2: Copyright Shireen Soliman 2020.

Author Biography

Shireen Soliman is an Egyptian-American artist, educator, advocate and mother. Shireen teaches at both Parsons School of Design and Pratt Institute, offering coursework under the umbrella of Design, Communications and Illustration. She is committed to representing and amplifying the voices and experiences of the Muslim-American community. Through the lens of Fashion, Shireen explores topics ranging from Muslim-American Identity, Cultural Diversity and Inclusion, Intersectionality, Representation. "When we raise our collective consciousness around the power of fashion to express Narrative, Heritage and Identity, we can then reclaim and own that power to honor and affirm each of our beautiful and glorious stories."



The Art Of Storying A Life

Alexandra Fidyk

Abstract

Attending what might be passed as an ordinary if difficult exchange with a fellow graduate student when in doctoral studies, the storyteller weaves a particular happening into a much more telling account of power and agency. The teller permits time and place to shift, amplifying other encounters in relation to the initial student meeting. While not easy reading, especially for those who enjoy a telling as smooth and direct, if you can allow yourself to wend along the curves, something unfolds. You will find yourself at a place not anticipated. And if willing, tasked with navigating a rub worthy of reflection. Traversing a tale from Calgary to Cairo, Saskatchewan to Japan, and back again, these vignettes, woven as one, leave the reader pondering what it means to be empowered.

The snapshot is the personal photographic equivalent of the local narrative.

~Lucy Lippard, *The Lure of the Local*, 1997, p. 55

The story and its telling are always adaptive. A narration is never a passive reflection of a reality. At the same time, it must always be truthful.

~Trinh T. Minh-ha, *When the Moon Waxes Red*, 1990, p. 13



[1]

A seven-day silent meditation retreat in Theravada Buddhist[1] tradition wraps up late Sunday afternoon. Our small group has been tucked into spruce at the foot of the Rockies where “stillness stills by the carrying out . . . of world and things in their presence” (Heidegger, 1971, p. 205). Low sun makes the quiet drive from scanty camp accommodations a languid return to city life.

This practice is the backdrop to entering my doctoral program, more concretely the education tower on Monday morning—an unearthy place. I immediately note the unimaginative layout of the 1960s architecture and opt for the hushed stairwell, climbing five floors to retrieve a reading pack for one of my first courses. As I step into the fifth floor, staccato speech hits me like stones thrown. I have not yet adjusted to the impact, ricochet, of this urban place.

The start to my studies is similar—an assault on many levels, little changes over four years. In a 600-level conceptualizing curriculum course, thought has not yet come as I struggle to enter the conversation, despite having taught for a decade in five different countries. Reconceptualising curricula from many cultural vantage points has been the way. I recently returned to Canada from Cairo and am still adjusting to a new narrative. It disorients to have concrete always beneath me. I drive into parkades; ride elevators; walk sidewalks from asphalt roads; enter buildings of cinder block and windows sealed. An unnatural abiding. It takes intention to land on porous ground. I ache for the suppleness of sand and the smell of street life—morning vendors who sing their wares alongside braying donkeys and barking dogs. And the *muezzin*’s call to prayer, *adhān*, a sonic imprint of surrender that still quiets my breath. I am misplaced and seek a recognisable rhythm. A measured motion to lean into—desert winds, vast sky, creative beat. While only one province west of my childhood home, itself a prairie, Alberta is not homeplace.

In *Conceptualising Curriculum Research*, *Foucault’s Challenge* directs the discussion on knowledge and power in education. Using the notion of sovereign power, Foucault gives attention to power’s productive dimensions. I settle, listening into the discussion about the social and conceptual conditions of the effects of power. Dialogue and argumentation appear to be fueled by unspoken, unseen biases and projections. We are to write a reflection on the dissonance between Foucault’s notion of power and our experiences of lived curriculum. My reflection, remembered in italics, weaves this telling, doubling the tale.[2]

I am without markers—as during my last 30-metre dive in Ras Mohamed—disoriented on the sea floor. The dark water of western enlightenment keeps us circling binaries, frozen identities, and closed structures. Halted by its shadow, postmodernity, socially constructed views of reality also privilege certain positions. Although a turn, I have no air, no voice here. When I offer thoughts and experience informed by Buddhism, the Vedas, and non-dual consciousness, my peers and teacher grow quiet. While no finger pointing occurs, it happens. In silent noticing where I actually am, “not of being right on, but of being slightly off” (Hillman, 1999, p. 128), an image forms—despite the place’s designation for higher learning, it does not welcome other views of reality. I am an outlander. Landless tenant.

Every landscape is a hermetic narrative: “finding a fitting place for oneself in the world is finding a place for oneself in a story” (Lippard, 1997, p. 33).

This story is a simple one—a child in a place. This child was the middle among five living children on a self-sustaining traditional family farm on Saskatchewan prairie. Long horizons under big sky. She loved flowers and horses. Tended chickens and gathered eggs. Respected her elders and loved her grandparents.

The spruce, tamarack, wheat, barley, deer, and geese who shaped place were home too. As far as her memory permitted, her favoured locale was with her horse. Not so much with neighbour kids or school kids where she was bused, but across the seasons, under drifting clouds, it was on her horse where she learned the world. Here and among old people, who spoke thick consonants and unfamiliar words. Words that reshaped her mouth. As she grew older, it was her baba whom spoke of traveling on ship, training across Canada, surviving by the hospitality of those along the road. Illiterate at 100, she had learned a new language, a new land.

In time, the child grew curious of rhythms beyond horse and farm. She turned toward the direction from which her baba had come and took flight.

Weekly conversations about curriculum conceptualisation pass without difficulty as long as I stay within the lines of dominant discourse, no reference to lived experience. After one class, an East Indian female student invites me to tea. In hindsight, she must have been deeply offended by my views—perhaps deemed me ignorant, racist. Sitting at a table with unmovable seats, she leans in to declare that it is she who does not have power, will never have the power I have. I am confused because I feel quite powerless and quite out-of-place in both Faculty and city. Schooling is possible only with student loans; no one from two extended familial lineages has gone to university before me, and many wonder: “is it worth it?” I have commenced a third degree, no savings, no children, and no cairn to navigate this international move where I have no friends or family.

She believes knowledge is power. Foucault’s concept of power “works through individual actions to vision and re-vision our ‘selves’ as acting, thinking and feeling persons” (Popkewitz & Brennan, 1998, p. 16). “Power in this landscape is ‘something’ that people own” and thus can be redistributed among groups to challenge inequities (p. 16). She reasserts her view. Her rapid speech jabs what lives between us. I am not in disagreement. Although I am deeply steeped in other fields of knowledge and do not yet have the language to suggest that multiple worldviews exist simultaneously and I dwell in them. Certainly, I recognise that forms of power imbue certain knowledge, certain carriers of knowledge, especially western scientific knowledge and thus sex, gender, body, and place. Yes, power can be distributed, if we agree that people own power, but I also know that power lives otherwise.

Eyes squint and forehead furrows, I try to understand her anger now directed at me. I hear her. I nod as I touch her words, bitter in my mouth. And her fury—voice now sharp and pointed—and know there is no space for me to speak of eastern, indigenous, pagan or farming cosmologies. These will dismiss her experience, as if both cannot co-exist. “What is spoken is never, and in no language, what is said” (Heidegger, 1971, p. 11).

I do not yet have an understanding of self and shadow (personal and collective) to acknowledge and indeed, had not yet drawn the parallel with a traditional farm childhood where gender roles were starkly drawn, maintained, and subverted, broke by grandmas, mothers, aunties, and cousins. I try to register her story and its relation to a Foucaultian standpoint. I cannot. For in what is happening, does she not have agency? Hers is “a kind of action, probing, burning, stripping, placing itself in dialogue with others out beyond the individual self” (Rich, 2001, p. 55).

I breathe from tree pose, rooted yet bending, not-yet critically aware of my story in relation to power and privilege. A most unconscious standpoint. From where I stand, my life was made possible by ancestors and their offspring—archetypal and familial—by every life lost and emergent at this table. Sitting here, her frustration with me palpable, hands still dismiss our intermediary, her torso leaning-in, rigid. She pulls-back when I ask of our energetic relations, third space, always already in-flow, stretching simultaneously into the not-yet but taunt with the plaited past.

The child, after more than a decade of living away—Finland, USA, England, China, Japan, Colombia, and Egypt—had come to see her movement as “simultaneously rooted and rootless” (Trinh T. Minh-ha, 1990, p. 335). Like Inanna, she cannot return home—but she can abide in what she learned on the way. Transgressing the rootedness of her childhood topography, these very roots configure the things she carried. Always homing. But in this last movement, she lost her ambit—too much unfamiliar. Tipped herms upturned north and she wobbled.

My question is met with expressions of contempt. I ask of unnecessary suffering, attachment, and desire—views rooted in the Four Noble Truths. I wonder of primordial bodily feeling, rising up through the same earth, the same stolen land beneath us, stories exchanged through flesh. I wonder of taking-in, breathing-in, one another through the gaps between. Taking in, *aesthesis*, means becoming intimate with the thing itself.

This conversation, the first with a fellow student since commencing my program, is not what I imagine it might be. Only months after moving unexpectedly from life in Egypt, I feel other. Despite the friendly French architects in my building, many in the Muslim neighbourhood consider me an indecent white woman living on her own, echoing memories of my life in Japan. There, both Japanese and non-Japanese men assume I am a hostess, a common job for western women. ‘Hostess’ softly embodies the history of the concubine, the geisha, which includes exorbitant tips and gifts, and seemingly permits men (on trains) to touch as they desire. Constant sexualisation causes me to find intricate and varied routes to my apartment after disembarking from the last train, transporting mostly drunken men—many whom try to follow me home. Leaving the country after a year of harassment and molestation, I become aggressive in response to the objectification and dehumanisation, vulgar comments and obscene gestures following me, a shadow long.

Japan becomes a teaching option from small town politics. Teaching loads and courses determined during beers after hockey games, events that exclude me as player and voice. The only female teaching grades ten to twelve in a large rural school in Saskatchewan. Opportunities for professional growth stymied or stolen as marriage and children become the story writ for me by fellow teachers and administration.

My peer still gesturing, grows increasingly angry at my ignorance, leaves me in distaste. A thickness hangs between us for the remainder of the course. She is not the only one stupefied by my questions. One professor called me a new-age flake, another asked if I belonged in education, suggesting religious studies a better fit, and a third threw back a theoretical exploration that embodied postmodern epistemology, prepared as a creation-centred métissage. He said it looked like a grade eight art project.

Dissonance continues to rumble through my studies. No place permits proposals alongside an unfolding implicate order where presence, silence, attention, and paradox are ways of knowing. Where “the art of awareness subsumes as well as enlivens arts of

listening, . . . seeing, dialogue, and learning” (Kumar, 2013, p. 110). Everywhere looms subjectivities and critique “where the main locus of power is in oneself” (Klein, 1995, p. 43). Poetic, contemplative, and creation-centred practices are barely tolerated. Their mindful play—“a way of orienting to life, a commitment that involves moment-to-moment inquiry into reality, and a willingness to stay open and creative” unwelcome (Park & Rabi, 2015, p. 132). That is, a tarrying “openness to life”: “open in affect”; “open in perception” (Macdonald, 1995, p. 20). In kind, I burrow into courses on consciousness, postmodernity, ecology, complexity theory, hermeneutics, interpretive research, curriculum studies, and so on; and surrender “to new horizons of sound and feeling” (Greene, 2001, p. 17) through the work of Trungpa Rinpoche, Pema Chödrön, Gary Snyder, Ed Casey, Jan Zwicky, Jane Hirshfield, Marion Woodman, Jung, and Hillman.

She knows that the boundaries by which she lived were transformative. For “a boundary was not that at which something stops but, . . . that from which something begins its essential unfolding” (Heidegger, 1971, p. 202). That is, its presencing. Space by necessity includes “the horismos, the horizon, the boundary” (p. 203). Her sense of rootlessness, of living between worlds, between an ever-present past and a non-integrated present, seemed to symbolise the condition of many today. Her sense of being, of dwelling, while always in-place, was in place while unfolding. Her nomadic way refused settling. She came into being on the move: riding the prairie, diving the sea, roaming the desert. A sense of self emerges at the unstable point where the “unspeakable stories of subjectivity meet the narratives of history, of a culture” (Hall, 1987, p. 44). This is why art is critical for teaching, for conceptualising curriculum—our sense of selves is a labour of the imagination, a fiction, particular stories that arise from the horizons of place.

Two years later, I experience a severe rupture. I return to sitting, breathing, holding—it is all that I can bear. Alone in *zazen*, the witness appears. It is here, attending my breath, day after day after day, I realize that it is not the meditative arts that heal but silence at their centre.[3] Like a prayer box torn by the wind, at the pole’s midpoint, stillness prevails. Art is like that. It has always resided at the centre of life. Making, attending, and studying (gathering, sorting, interpreting), art sophisticates thought, heart-seeing, body-tuning. In this way, “learning the arts is not only about creative expression; it is about thinking, knowledge, and understanding” (Donahue & Stuart, 2010, p. 7). As in this storying, art, *poiesis* dwells at the centre of coursing as it symbolically mediates all knowing and learning. It is “a cure and a protection” (Minh-ha, 1989, p. 140). Such creating is kin to curing, re-generating, where the basis of “healing rests on *reconciliation*, hence the necessity for the family and or the community to cooperate, partake in, and witness the recovery” (p. 140). Just as readers listen to this telling, feel through its weavings, we unite in story. Something poetic, electric, unfolds between teller and listener, arising of its own accord, transforming us through the tangible unseen. Storying remakes us both—the teller and the witness. And by *communitas*, we beget power.

Endnotes

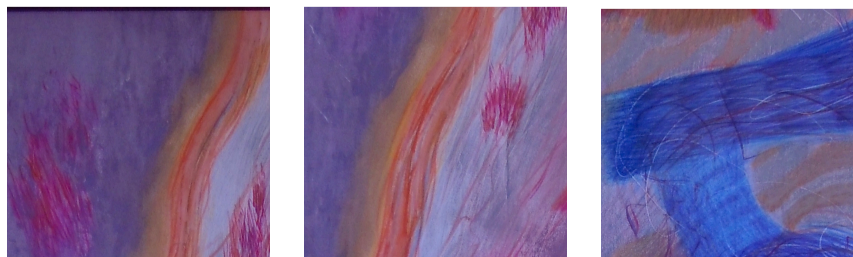
- [1] This image of a Buddha head, lodged within the tangled roots of a famous Bodhi tree, was taken at one of the Ayutthaya's historic temples in Thailand. While living in Japan, I travelled to Thailand and visited many temples, reading and becoming immersed in Theravada, meaning in Pali: "Way of the Elders." The monk who led this retreat was of the Thai Forest Tradition. Photo by Justin Vidamo Creative Commons license found at <https://www.flickr.com/photos/21160499@N04/7622957878/in/photostream/>
- [2] The italicized writing is select paragraphs taken from my actual assignment submitted fall 2001.
- [3] In fact, it was this event that crystallized my dissertation research: an ontological study of silence in learning, *Silence and Eros: Beckoning the Background Forward*.
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Complete Puzzle Picture for Stories that Mattered
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Oil bars on Lithograph paper
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