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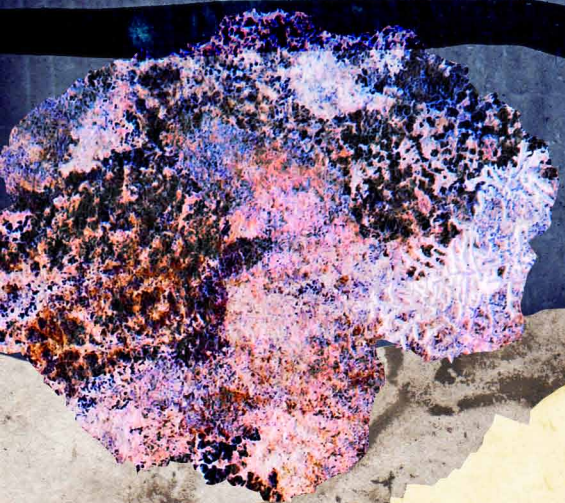
UNESCO Observatory Multi-Disciplinary Journal in the Arts

SPECIAL ISSUE

A/r/tography and the Visual Arts



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ABOUT THE E–JOURNAL

The UNESCO Observatory refereed e-journal is based within the Graduate School of Education at The University of Melbourne, Australia. The journal promotes multi-disciplinary research in the Arts and Education and arose out of a recognised need for knowledge sharing in the field. The publication of diverse arts and cultural experiences within a multi-disciplinary context informs the development of future initiatives in this expanding field. There are many instances where the arts work successfully in collaboration with formerly non-traditional partners such as the sciences and health care, and this peer-reviewed journal aims to publish examples of excellence.

Valuable contributions from international researchers are providing evidence of the impact of the arts on individuals, groups and organisations across all sectors of society. The UNESCO Observatory refereed e-journal is a clearing house of research which can be used to support advocacy processes; to improve practice; influence policy making, and benefit the integration of the arts in formal and non-formal educational systems across communities, regions and countries.

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Special Issue: A/r/tography and the Arts

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THEME

To be engaged in the practice of a/r/tography means to inquire in the world through an ongoing process of art making in any art form and writing not separate or illustrative of each other but interconnected and woven through each other to create relational and/or enhanced meanings. A/r/tographical work are often rendered through the methodological concepts of contiguity, living inquiry, openings, metaphor/metonymy, reverberations and excess, which are enacted and presented/performed when a relational aesthetic inquiry condition is envisioned as embodied understandings and exchanges between art and text, and between and among the broadly conceived identities of artist/researcher/teacher. A/r/tography is inherently about self as artist/researcher/teacher yet it is also social when groups or communities of a/r/tographers come together to engage in shared inquiries, act as critical friends, articulate an evolution of research questions, and present their collective evocative/provocative works to others (see http://m1.cust.educ.ubc.ca/Artography/).

This special issue of Multi-Disciplinary Research in the Arts invites original creative and scholarly inquiry that engages in critical debates and issues regarding a/r/tographical methodologies; are exemplars of critical approaches to a/r/tographical research; and/or extend the boundaries of inquiry-based research. Contributions are welcome from disciplines across the arts, humanities and social sciences and in a wide range of formats including articles, essays, and artistic interludes, which explore diverse forms of the arts from drama, dance, poetry, narrative, music, visual arts, digital media and more.

A Journey of Trust: Navigating Aesthetic Experience in a Pre-service Classroom

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ABSTRACT

What does confidence in process look like? What does it feel like? And why is it necessary? Navigating the world as an artist, teacher, and researcher has led me to question what it takes to trust in aesthetic experience. What is necessary for those unwilling or seemingly unable to perceive themselves as creative, artistic beings, to have confidence in creative process? In this paper, I investigate evolving methodologies for illuminating the creative process in order to better examine the perceptions of future teachers and their journey to trusting that process. Exploring what pre-service teacher perceptions are in an arts methods course that is structured to encourage the evolution of the artistic self, is a positive step to understanding potential resistance and unfamiliarity with the creative process and the potential for learning through trusting aesthetic experience as an artist/researcher/teacher.

KEYWORDS

trust, creative process, a/r/tography, pre-service teachers, confidence, aesthetic experience

I'm going down,
Follow if you want, I won't just hang around,
Like you'll show me where to go,
I'm already out, of foolproof ideas, so don't ask me how
To get started, it's all uncharted...
(Sara Bareilles, Album: Kaleidoscope Heart, Song title: Uncharted)

The lyrics of a popular song highlight the angst present as each of us search for meaning within our lives and ultimately find that there are, actually, no answers to be found. The learning, the journey, the insights within life experiences; they all come from an "uncharted", unfamiliar process that presents itself to us, once we commit to beginning a journey. The commitment is the tricky and often ignored part, as it asks for trust in something unknown.

The journey of a new relationship, a new path in life, a new career, or a new course in school, come with a need for trust; in one's self, one's space, and ultimately, one's creative process; or the ideas we act upon to navigate our world. "Foolproof ideas" gone, we must take risks, relying on experimentation, mistakes, and the unexpected to point the way, and acknowledge that the path you travel will be unlike those around you. Trust asks us, as Dewey (1934) does in *Art as Experience*, to see "more" rather than see "as" and to trust in the unknown and the potential of experience in order to grow. Dewey, as well as songwriter Bareilles, places a premium on the creative process within experience in order to find openings for trust that allow us to perceive the world for what it can hold.

The pre-service teachers I have had the privilege to teach have barely scratched the surface in exploring the potential of their own creative process. A majority of the students in my *Arts in the Elementary Curriculum* course (part of the teacher preparation for future elementary teachers) consistently display a lack of confidence in themselves, their environment, and their creative process. In a class designed to teach future elementary teachers how to integrate and become more familiar with the role the arts play in learning of all kinds, roadblocks are thrown up at the mere mention of, "We'll be creating art this semester." What will it take for these students to begin to see themselves as creative beings, bursting with potential and willing to explore that potential through risking a step into the unknown? After all, until they

learn to engage the unknown through creative process themselves, how can they ask their future students to do the same? How will they know the world without interacting with its aesthetic qualities and meanings? This investigation is a step towards better understanding what is necessary to step beyond ourselves and move toward understanding the creative processes as making us who we are.

Navigating the world as an artist, a teacher, and a researcher has led me to question what it takes to trust in aesthetic experience. What is necessary for those unwilling or seemingly unable to perceive themselves as creative, artistic beings, to have confidence in creative process? What role does our perception of ourselves and our environment play in willingly giving ourselves over to the unknown potential of the creative process within aesthetic experience? In this paper, I explore the creative process through my "knowings" as artist, researcher, and teacher in order to better examine the perceptions of future teachers and their growing confidence in themselves, their environment, and their own creative process. Although 'artist', 'researcher', and 'teacher' are labelled separately, all have intersections with one another and reveal the complex ground of trusting process: Evolving theory in creativity and process, the role of the arts in trusting process, and a classroom context to consider trust in process. I conclude with making connections between trusting process and the aesthetic space of teaching/learning and the benefits of cultivating those connections.

EVOLVING METHODOLOGY FOR UNDERSTANDING THE CREATIVE PROCESS:

MY KNOWINGS AS RESEARCHER

I begin with "knowings as researcher" in order to map the terrain of evolving methodologies considering learning through creative process and aesthetic experience. As I seek an appropriate avenue to draw upon the theories of aesthetic experience and its relationship to teaching/learning spaces, I find myself questioning "the madness in our methods" as Higgins (2007) does in his essay considering the arts and their inevitable multiplicity in learning. He points out that it is in a search for perceptiveness that we may begin to notice as researchers, what others do not. Higgins highlights Dewey's (1934) call to avoid labelling as we travel through life and live fully through avoiding mere recognition in favor of deeper, more attentive understanding or what Maxine Greene (1995) calls "wide-awakeness." Eisner (1998) echoes a need for "methodological pluralism" when considering such a complex social experience as education and the arts. He identifies the need to understand a system and its workings together, rather than out of context from one another. In commenting on qualitative method he states,

> *Qualitative inquiry requires a considerable faith that researchers will be sensitive to the significant and able to make the right moves in context...As in a good conversation, one listens to the other, and how, when, and what one says depends upon what the other has said (p. 170).*

Research, along with the social experiences of teaching and learning, is akin to this dialogic practice. As an artist, I work to create a dialogue between myself and my work, the material, and connecting ideas. As a researcher, I am in constant conversation with subject matter, context, method, participants, and ourselves as we consider and interpret new understandings. As a teacher, I continually create new and better ways to communicate with our students and encourage their connection to subject matter.

Higgins (2007) supports connecting artistic practice to research practice identifying what he calls "artistic strategies for cultivating perception." He asks what education in research might look like if we were to focus on the cultivation of perception rather than the "well-equipped technician", paying more attention to context rather than an imposed structure on that context. The strategies he mentions focus on "seeing as and seeing more" as well as "prolonging perception through exploration of a medium" (p. 392). Rather than pre-determined forms overtaking a research experience, research becomes about the context; the story; the subjects; the situation. The potential for new genuine inquiry within a study greatly increase because the researcher is more open and flexible and attentive. Isn't this what most researchers aim for – to *know* something better, more intimately, in order to learn about/from it and serve people's well being (Hostetler, 2005; 2011)?

These ideas allude to a sense of being in the world that calls forth attentiveness, perceptiveness, and a desire to learn through truly experiencing the world. It is this same call to attentiveness that leads me to draw upon the interpretive traditions of a/r/tography, self-study, and aesthetic inquiry. The intersections of these traditions bring forward a growing awareness for the power of individual experience, the story

of human creativity, and the necessity of acknowledging the complexity present in teaching/learning experiences of all kinds.

A/r/tography (artist/researcher/teacher – ography), examines the fluctuation between the desire to know, to do, and to create – constantly finding connections and adaptability within those identities (Irwin, 2004). Being an artist-researcher-teacher enables me to live within multiple spaces, considering multiple perspectives at the intersections of thought and action. There is fluidity to considering my work through the lens of a/r/tography, as it helps define the complex nature of being someone interested in examining the world intellectually, sensually, and actively. I understand these ways of knowing to be simultaneous and not mutually exclusive. To understand something as a teacher is to consider it as an artist and a perpetual student of life. I have come to trust these concurrent processes as ways of understanding the world with deeper meaning. It is a "shuffling" of identities (Pente, 2004) that allows one to fold into and grow from another. One element of self does not turn off while another turns on. They are interwoven pieces of self that have blurred edges and can be fragmented, but yet are sewn together with a rich history of self and hope for the future (Springgay, 2004).

A/r/tographical work is an intense study of self in educational, creative context. For this reason self-study research has also informed and added to how I consider my artist/researcher/teacher roles. Fitzgerald, Farstad and Deemer (2002) discuss self-study and I find resonance in their thinking:

> *We work to improve teacher education in order, ultimately, to improve the education our graduates will provide...We try to practice what we preach, to serve as models of reflective practice and lifelong learning. We recognize that in order to help classroom teachers change their practice, we have to start by changing our own practices in teacher education (p. 220).*

This manifesto clearly spells out my intentions in embarking on a study of my classroom and the life within it. The emphasis placed on reflection as a life-long process calls forth the same concentration and desire that a/r/tography places on the research of self and other. We learn about ourselves in relation to others. We, as artists, researchers, and teachers attempt to access modes of thinking and action in order to better understand how learning works for us, as well as our students, and how we may make it a more meaningful and purposeful endeavor (See also: Loughran, 2002). Sullivan (2005) describes the plurality of new ideas and voices as able to open dialogue, promoting not only examination of the issue or problem, but also generating change. He also portrays the metaphor of a braid in which various materials, languages, contexts, and voices work together in order to understand and make meaning of creative process. These complex combinations of ideas come together creating constant dialogue – asking the artist, researcher, and teacher to move within meanings, generating new inquiry in the arts.

The practice of aesthetic inquiry also provides just such an opportunity to consider research as forming and re-forming within interactions in the classroom. Just as an artist works with the materials they have in front of them, thoughtfully responding to their work through the process of creation, I view my methodology for this investigation into trust developing alongside mine and my students' experiences in the classroom. Aesthetic inquiry is formed by the opportunities to see, feel, create,

and understand the emerging qualities present in experience (Alexander, 2003; Bresler, 2006; Macintyre Latta & Baer, 2010; White, 2007). This opens the door for students to consider themselves as artists, researchers, and teachers.

I don't wish to impose a structure upon something that has the potential for creating its own texture and form. Dewey (1916) argues that one of the central attitudes for intellectual effectiveness is open-mindedness. He states that in order to grow and develop, we must welcome new ideas and allow situations to unfold, practicing "intellectual hospitality" for ourselves and our students. This concept of intellectual hospitality is central to how I understand my role as artist, researcher, and teacher. It poses an opportunity to be attentive to how students (and I) interact with one another in the classroom, moving within artistic experiences and developing trust in the creative process as we learn from the materials, the space, and one another.

THE ROLE OF THE ARTS IN TRUSTING PROCESS: KNOWINGS OF ARTISTS

The premium of the arts and their role within aesthetic experience lie in their ability to make possible the unforeseeable. As an artist, I have come to trust creative process to entail uncertainty and hold potential for ideas yet to come. Standing in the darkroom, watching as a photograph slowly appears in the developer, feeling the moment when I should move it to the next bath of liquid, stopping the developing process; it seems slow and so quick at the same time, watching the blacks and grays come to life on the photo paper. I immediately start to plan the next photograph – the timing, the amount of exposure, and the sections that may need a bit more time to show in full detail. I seamlessly move from one tray to the next, moving the photograph through the steps it needs to be realized. Then, as I place it on the rack to dry, returning to the enlarger, I see the image again and adjust details of focus and framing. The dance from exposure to drying rack begins again and my body knows what to do. I am part of the process, moving with the materials and constantly responding and adjusting to each movement and detail of the experience.

Bayles and Orland (1993) also describe what creative process can look like as an artist takes hold of uncertainty and grows in the making of art and of themselves.

> *A piece of art is the surface expression of a life lived within productive patterns. Over time, the life of a productive artist becomes filled with useful conventions and practical methods...And in truly happy moments those artistic gestures move beyond simple procedure, and acquire an inherent aesthetic all their own...They allow confidence and concentration. They allow not knowing. They allow the automatic and unarticulated to remain so (pp. 61-62).*

In their description, Bayles and Orland (1993) make possible a holistic sense of what it means to become trusting within the creative process. They capture an expressive, continuing experience that undulates through moments of celebration and disparity; a series of experiences that asks not for correct or even final answers, but one that necessitates openness, wide-awakeness, and a deep desire to live a life of inquiry (Greene, 1995). Hasebe-Ludt, Chambers & Leggo (2009) illustrate this beautifully in their collaborative search through Métissage and Braiding. In this creative endeavor, these writers/artists seek to weave their stories together in search of a more coherent telling of *Lebenswelt*, or, lifeworld. They seek to innovatively dwell within the act of writing and telling their narratives together, allowing the experience to change who they are and how they understand the world.

> *We are guided by our aesthetic and artistic sensitivities and sensibilities. Our trust in this process is based on both our individual and joint intuitive insights and experiences.... We test our mature sense of trust in each other and in a creative collaborative process that is full of surprises, filled with emotional intelligence, and steeped in mature yet incomplete knowledge of the world (p. 7).*

These writers/artists describe an effortful connection being made between their own writing and that of others. They meaningfully, seek out opportunities to share their work in order to better understand their own, as well as the work existing around their own. They can never predict how/where the intersections of their

writing will fall, and as such, have become attuned to the unforeseeable potential of greater understanding through the art of collaborative writing and story-telling.

The darkroom and Métissage examples give a holistic sense of what it means to trust creative process. So what does it *feel* like to trust the creative process? What does it *look* like? Just as a painter is drawn to the textures, smells, and vibrancy of mounds of paint on a pristine canvas, the sensibilities of what it means to trust can be explicated through the all-important senses of physical experience - what it *feels* like, *looks* like, *sounds* like etc. All too often separations exist in how we consider experience in the mind and embodied understanding of that experience. The mind *and* the body are enfleshed within a common aesthetic living that can only find full meaning when unified (Dewey, 1934). Trusting aesthetic experience, then, means to consider the whole; the nature of human interaction and the emotions, thought, and consequences it potentializes. The arts open up that potential and ask the artist/creative being to respond. Dewey (1934) continues to describe how this responding becomes part of our everyday interactions. When we choose the aesthetic to take action, familiarity is bypassed, routine is dissipated, and our attention is called forth to a new, fresh perspective on the world. Artist Robert Henri (1923) describes a similar idea:

> *There are moments in our lives, there are moments in the day, when we seem to see beyond the usual. Such are the moments of our greatest happiness...of our greatest wisdom. If one could but recall his [sic] vision by some sort of sign. It was in this hope that the arts were invented. Sign–posts on the way to what may be. Sign–posts toward greater knowledge (p. 13).*

Henri (1923) not only speaks of the everyday moments or experiences that lead us to understanding through the aesthetic, but the very impulse to create. The arts become meaningful when we can fully trust in the aesthetic process that they inherently contain. We create because it is necessary for living. He states,

> *ART is the inevitable consequence of growth and is the manifestation of the principles of its origin. The work of art is a result; is the output of a progress in development....It is not an end in itself, but the work indicates the course taken in the progress made the work is not a finality. It promises more... It is the impress of those who live in full play of their faculties (p. 67).*

The "full play of their faculties" allows those who seek aesthetic experience to see beyond what simply *is* to what *could be*. It is active engagement in picking up a freshly sharpened pencil and noticing how intimately it fits in your hand. It is the rush of adrenaline that fills your body as you step in front of an audience to deliver a monologue. Alexander (1998) reminds us through an explanation of Dewey's notion of the arts that "'Doing' is more than acting or reacting; it is responding, organizing our energies *toward* the world in a coordinated, discriminating way. When undergoing and doing are integrated, there is intelligence, there is art" (p. 9). Dancers organize their movements into a flowing rhythm, reaching toward one another and filling openings with instinctive responsiveness to the give and take of bodies in space. A musician carefully discriminates when and how to join in a jazz improvisation, "riffing" within a coordinated set of notes and harmonies. The human experience is rich with the potential of these embodied experiences. It is within these experiences that we see and feel the vibrations of a world at play. It is as Dewey (1934) states,

> *Art throws off the covers that hide the expressiveness of experienced things; it quickens us from the slackness of routine and enables us to forget ourselves by finding ourselves in the delight of experiencing the world about us in its varied qualities and forms (p. 104).*

Dewey vibrantly places the arts as primary to understanding the growth of human potential. He boldly suggests that in order for us to truly know the fibre of our being and our interconnectedness to the world, we must engage in aesthetic experiences.

Engagement in the creative process, in the arts, allow for such opportunities in growth, understanding, and trust. We live more fully when we can move forward, sure that the decisions we make are ours and are an extension of ourselves. The key in considering trust and the aesthetic experience is at the intersection of self and other and the inherent creative process. This intersection is the origin of how we learn and the space in which we make it possible for others to learn and it is at the crux of cultivating trust. "To educate" originates from the idea "to bring forth"; telling the story of lived aesthetic experience and being open to the world and its possibilities. It is these connections I draw upon to consider what the arts have to offer in a learning/teaching environment. Specifically, what do the participants of *Arts in the Elementary Curriculum* have to say about their growing trust in themselves, their arts classroom environment, and their creative process?

A CONTEXT FOR EXPLORING TRUST: MY KNOWINGS AS TEACHER

Arts in the Elementary Curriculum is a course required of all pre-service students in their elementary education program. There are usually 20 to 30 undergraduate students enrolled each term. The class meets twice a week and is designed to not only expose students to the arts, but encourage their work as artists, and get them thinking about arts as a way of thinking in their teaching.

BEGINNING IN A PLACE OF DISTRUST

> *Attentiveness and responsiveness are not natural to everyone who wants to take up the work of teaching (Hansen 2005, p. 60).*

Drawing on the philosophy of John Dewey, Alexander (1998) maintains, "The tragedy of the human condition is that we have accepted a maimed version of experience as 'normal' and so have had to explain genuine experience as 'abnormal,' 'transcendent,' or 'pure'" (p. 12). The students who walk into my classroom are no exception. They deeply desire meaningful connection, but assign aesthetic experiences to those "more worthy and talented." I often hear, "Well, my sister is the artist of the family, not me" or "I can't do that creative stuff." When we visit a gallery together it's not uncommon to hear frustrations about not "getting it" or unwillingness to try. They categorize themselves outside of the "world of art" and feel too disconnected to even form an opinion about it. They often lack a workable understanding of the aesthetic experience and are out of practice in how to encounter and make the most of creative opportunity. They lose themselves in the inevitable lurching for a "good grade", to check off one more methods class from their list of to-do's before they can enter into teaching in their own classroom. They have learned, all-too-well, that being a "good student" doesn't always require being true to themselves. They have learned the system. They are "good students." They will do what they are asked to do and not openly question why they are asked to do it. It is in that lack of questioning that they have become apathetic to *why* they are asked to do things. The lust for learning *why* and *how* we learn diminishes little by little. And it is within this continuing loss that the potential for aesthetic experience is buried, misunderstood, and/or taken for granted.

Distrust in process can be a roadblock to opening up the potential of new experience, so I emphasize to students the importance of finding the reasoning for why we teach the arts. I ask students to rationalize why we choose certain things as teachers and how our own preferences and knowledge play a role in those decisions. My hope of this line of inquiry is a student more focused on inquiry, and more demanding of the curriculum and themselves as teachers. For example, as part of learning to plan for the arts, students study how to write a lesson rationale, stating why they will teach what they are, beyond the "It's in the textbook" reasoning. My students are asked to consider the "big idea" and how what they're teaching specifically connects to students' lives. Below, Maya's comment represents a growing awareness of how this type of planning is important for areas beyond art as well.

Maya: You should really keep teaching that rationale thing...I've never done that before... and it's really important. We don't do that in other classes but you would think it's a pretty basic thing...to know why you teach what you do (Field notes, May 2010).

Maya hadn't realized or been awakened to the idea that in organizing her thoughts around why she chose to teach the way she did, she was engaging in an aesthetic understanding of how her students learn and the creative process of teaching. At the beginning of this rationale writing, Maya was distrustful that she would be able to uncover the "big ideas" of her lesson or that it would useful even if she did.

Distrust also takes the form of a student's hesitance to participate in class. Celia was a quiet student who rarely let her voice be heard. When she did contribute, it was in short statements that made clear that any elaboration would have been painful. The quiet, low tone of her voice, the flush of cheeks, and the way she looked anywhere but the person she was speaking to, kept her distant from the center of discussion. Her distrust seemed palpable between other students, myself as the instructor, the space we were in, and/or the idea of discussion itself. She navigated her way through class, day after day, avoiding any real depth in her remarks and moving carefully so as not to disrupt what was going on around her. It seemed she was attempting to be invisible, not initiating any conversation or engaging with others who did.

Another student, Nadine, began from a perspective of strict impossibility:

I'm just not creative! I don't have a creative bone in my body, even my funny bone thinks logically. It's not that I don't wish I had a talent for the arts, I do. Believe me, I've always wanted the ability to express myself through different mediums, to have the ability to draw, sing, or dance. But, I don't. I can't let go....Don't ask me how I feel or expect me to genuinely reflect, I just do not work that way (Student Work, November, 2009).

Nadine was determined to pit logic and art against one another, as well as the idea of talent and practice. She thought she knew exactly where she stood within her capabilities and found it difficult to move past that.

Hansen (2005) states, that responsiveness and attentiveness are not necessarily natural to all who want to teach. Maya, Celia, and Nadine's stories are representative of the students I encounter in *Arts in the Elementary Curriculum*. Because of this, it becomes even more necessary to create and encourage creative process in the classroom. The distrust they have is an individual starting place for considering the possibilities of aesthetic experience.

MOVING INTO TRUST OF/THROUGH AESTHETIC EXPERIENCE

Rather than a dazzling spectacle or show, creativity in teaching can be understood as a quiet, steady habit of generating and realizing meaning (Hansen 2005, p. 67).

Moving into trust through aesthetic experience necessitates careful planning that supports an open structure of inquiry in the classroom. As the instructor of *Arts in the Elementary Curriculum*, I have attempted to create opportunities for this creative process of understanding teaching and learning through the arts. Engagement in studio work has become one of those opportunities, providing space for students to encounter the arts from within aesthetic inquiry: constantly entering and re-

entering the creative process on their own terms. Essentially, they are exploring what it means to be an a/r/tographer, weaving together ideas of teaching, learning, artistry, and inquiry.

The first studio experience students encounter in my class is usually drawing exercises in gesture (capturing movement) and contour (detailed line drawing). Both of these drawing techniques are really about learning to see. I discuss that with students, telling them that the end product is not of our concern, and that I just want them to focus on the act of seeing and let their hands/pencils follow. I demonstrate each technique without giving any definitions asking them to identify qualities of what they saw. With gesture, they see me create a quick, messy drawing with many lines that hastily describes the model's gesture. The contour demonstration is more difficult, as I have them watch me for at least 2 minutes (always seems like more) carefully and slowly begin the outline of the model's face. Without fail, each class is silent, watching me move my pencil only as quickly as my eye travels around the model's face. Internally, I have to remind myself to stay slow and focused because I want to model patience with myself as an artist, focusing on my subject, rather than my drawing. After we discuss the qualities of each type of drawing, practice begins.

Inevitably, after each 30-second gesture, or 5-minute contour drawing, giggles and gasps fill the room. I have learned to wait for these to time themselves out rather than demand immediate quiet for another drawing. It seems necessary for them to respond and I have learned to use it as an opportunity for students to explain what they're responding to and why. "It looks weird? Why?" "You don't like it? What about it doesn't work for you?" As a class, we can then begin to discover the learning process of this type of drawing, encountering the process authentically through discovery rather than me delivering the steps to a "good drawing." After all, it's about *seeing*. That two-hour drawing experience tends to leave students with a variety of responses. My readily confident students come back the next class having practiced both techniques in their sketchbook and readily show me their progress. For others I notice, over their shoulders, their practice of the techniques. Still others readily tell me that they hate one or both and may not ever use it again if they don't have to.

About halfway through *Arts in the Elementary Curriculum*, students have encountered a variety of media: pencil, charcoal, pastel, oil pastel, tempera, watercolor, collage, music, theatre exercises, etc. The evidence that trust is growing takes many forms: In-class studio time seems to transform from heavy socializing to a focused, quiet hum of working. I often play music while students work and notice not only a decrease of conversation, but also a change in topic from evening plans to getting feedback on their work. Students start staying longer in class, paying less attention to the clock. They don't rush to pack their things when I announce there are 5 minutes left in class. In fact, there is an audible groan when I tell them it's time to clean up. There are also usually a few students who begin to regularly stay late to finish a project, or bounce ideas off me for their future work. Where at the beginning of the course, I might hear, "So, what are you looking for in this project?", The more studio work the students do, the more apt they are to say, "So, I saw this online the other day and was thinking about doing something like it. What do you think?" My role is less the teacher with answers, and more like a fellow artist with helpful suggestions. They respond to my comments as a perspective, rather than the right answer to their question.

This is also the time in the semester where students are really beginning to work on their out-of-class Studio Series. They have most likely chosen a medium, but have yet to spend quality time with it. Many students are still jumping around from medium to medium, not confident that they can produce three final works with it. I offer up suggestions to consider looking at how other artists have used the medium, but above all, keep practicing. "It is through your practice that you will discover the medium and how you will want to respond." The blank stares I got at the beginning of the semester to that phrase are now hesitant nods. I invite students to bring in their practice work and get feedback from classmates and myself – to be in conversation with their work and their process – and many do.

Fast-forward to the end of the semester. It's exhibition day and students have been invited to bring their final pieces to include in the class gallery-walk. Beautiful, varied work covers the classroom walls and we spend the first 20 minutes eating, socializing, and perusing artwork. Students take the opportunity to linger at pieces, leaning in for a closer look, and making soft comments to those around them. There is the occasional, "Wow!" and "How'd they do that?" heard across the room. After seats are taken, students take turns standing by their work, describing the pieces and their journey along the way. In comparison to the nervous outbursts from the beginning of the course with their gesture and contour practice, students take on a more determined, non-apologetic stance as they discuss what worked and what didn't with their pieces. They spend more careful time describing their inspiration for the work and what they might do differently on their next piece. The creative process has become familiar to them. Students then field questions and comments from the class about their work and their process. It always impresses me seeing the change in simple things like posture and tone of voice. Students will speak with more authority than I had seen before and in a clearer voice as they step up next to their pieces. Students who work to avoid classroom discussion will elaborate in detail, standing proudly and looking people in the eye as they talk.

Of course, this picture of confidence isn't always the case. Many meet this end-of-course deadline with much trepidation and uncertainty of what they might hear from their peers. With many students, after the questions have been answered and a round of applause has been given, there is often visible relief as the student treads back to their seat, sighing and sliding into the chair with a sheepish grin and flushed cheeks as they get silent thumbs-up from their tablemates. Either way, it clear that this course milestone is significant to students and it is even more evident in their Studio Series reflections:

> *The most important part of my visual series is that it convinced me of some hidden artistic talent I never knew I had.*
>
> *Since I'm not overly confident in my artistic abilities, I chose to be a little on the safe side. I knew regardless of what I did, I would never be completely satisfied and I was right. I went in completely open-minded and let my paint brush just guide me. As I did that I noticed that the less I tried to be perfect the better response I got out of the audience and myself....Throughout this process I have had a rollercoaster of feelings towards my pieces.*
>
> *This assignment was a great opportunity to unbury my passion for photography.*

You cannot be afraid to move out of your comfort zone….By choosing to work with watercolor, I realized that in all actuality, I can paint!

One student in particular, wrote directly to me as if this written reflection was a letter between us:

I felt you, [author name], gave me a vision, and I felt like an art student when I was talking to you, and that is something I was not expecting at all. You gave me a good direction and molded my ideas to help me create my final pieces. I love the direction that my pieces ended up and I am glad I was able to talk to you.

(Student Reflections, November 2010)

An important element in understanding through the arts comes from within the act of creation. Dewey (1934) explains experience through the connectedness encountered in such interactions with self, medium, and environment. It is the intersections of our daily lives and rich experience that we are able to make meaning and grow our ability to learn. The arts provide openings where experiences from our daily lives take on meaningful significance through continued reflection and response in action. We create; we reflect; we understand; we respond and create again; we understand differently. Macintyre Latta & Baer (2010) emphasize this continual process by describing Dewey's theory through Scottish artist Andy Goldsworthy's (2004) "moving about, moving within, moving without, moving through repeated visits" of the land. Dewey's phrasing takes form in Goldsworthy's film, *Rivers and Tides*, as he traverses the land, creating, watching, building, and contemplating what it means to interact with the land and to be in a space and the temporal nature of creation. These connections to space, material, and self as artist are integral parts of understanding how the creative process works through continued aesthetic inquiry. It is this continuation through process that can lead to the creation of steady habits of realizing meaning within teaching and learning (Hansen, 2005).

CULTIVATING AND SUSTAINING TRUST IN PROCESS: BEING IN CONVERSATION

…creativity in teaching often emerges in the unexpected, the unanticipated, and the unscripted…it takes form through attentiveness, a capacity to wait patiently and listen in the very midst of teaching, and then to move accordingly (Hansen 2005, p. 59).

I want the students of *Arts in the Elementary Curriculum* to enter into conversation with themselves as genuine artists of education. I see learning and teaching as a creative process of negotiating space, attending to materials, meeting and working with resistance and fear, and repeatedly seeking out the rhythm of understanding one's place in the world. Some recent field notes reflect a continuing belief in the energy that all of that entails:

It just feels good…refreshing, comfortable, familiar to be in a room full of ideas, creation, moving, thinking. It's like a breath of full air taken in and slowly let out, giving oxygen to every part of my body. There is variety, difference…they are asking for materials, making decisions, looking to fulfill ideas and adapting to materials they see them and as I can find them. There is periodic searches for more material, and they pause before sitting, looking, thinking…music playing in the background. Some socializing, a pleasant

hum and rise and fall of discussion. An intensity of choice, rather than casual giving in to what will satisfy the assignment (Field notes, September 2011).

These quiet acts of waiting, listening, and patiently considering my classroom as it was happening, allow for moments of clarity. During and after such moments, I am better able to respond and move within the teaching/learning experience, feeling that I am part of the texture of the classroom moving alongside my students. Our concomitant, interwoven journeys embody the very essence of a/r/tography: linking together our understandings of what it means to be artists, researchers, and teachers seeking an enlarged understanding of self in relation to our world.

Working within this a/r/tographical way of being, I am confident my students and I are capable of growing trust in ourselves and in the creative process. In teaching this course for several years, I have found that this could be evidenced in many ways. Maya, Celia, and Nadine began the course at some level of distrust, but found possibility through continuing experiences in creativity. Given the opportunity to engage a/r/tographical understandings, they discovered already-present abilities and a growing trust in the arts as beneficial to themselves and the classroom. They began to more readily connect what it meant to be a practicing artist, considering ideas of teaching/learning, engaged in reflective inquiry.

Maya's declaration of the importance of rationale in lesson planning opened a new pathway with which to think about curriculum. It was she, in a class of around 25 students that struggled the most during her rationale writing. Maya would have me read and re-read her revisions, working with ideas and talking with classmates, always attempting and grappling with how to circle back to the purpose of what she was teaching. Honestly, I doubted whether she would embrace the process after so many struggles, thinking it was too counter-intuitive to how she'd learned to theorize lesson planning. Brilliantly, Maya persisted and found the complicated, aesthetic process of lesson writing to be more rewarding than what she'd encountered previously.

It wasn't until the presentation of Celia's pencil drawings that students found it pertinent to move past her uninviting demeanor and find out who she really was. Her skillfully drawn images gained favor from the class and in her responses to inquiries about them, her voice got louder and leveled into a more comfortable timbre. Her creative process became the center of discussion and she was glad to join in conversation, pointing to her work and making eye contact with those wanting to interact with her and her work.

Nadine's journey through *Arts in the Elementary Curriculum* seemed to reflect a careful, persistent doubt. She doubted she could do things before she'd ever tried doing them. Nadine's contributions to class discussions were precise, taut examples of rigid defiance to anything she labelled *artistic*. However, I am happy to report that her experience in creating her studio series resulted in a confident Nadine; however this time, instead of being confident of her inevitable failure, she found confidence in her successfully created drawings.

Students like Maya, Celia, and Nadine become individuals in search of connection, looking beyond singular definitions and embracing the multiplicity of self as artist, researcher, and teacher. They entered *Arts in the Elementary Curriculum* with

conclusions about how one navigates the world and those conclusions have been pulled up short (Gadamer, 2004), needing a broader view of themselves and their capabilities. After spending time engaging with the arts and the aesthetic with curriculum, it wasn't enough anymore to interpret themselves so singularly. Maya left the course believing in her ability to see the flow of a learning experience and the creative process necessary to understanding her choices in curriculum writing. Nadine began to see herself anew through her creative process. Her drawings became evidence that while still logically rigid to a fault, confidence could be gained through artistic practice. As future teachers they must look to the relations across the complex identities of artist/researcher/teacher to bring together and flesh out new ideas and meanings.

THE IMPORTANCE OF TRUSTING PROCESS

Teaching is a complex profession and it is important for pre-service students to encounter that complexity prepared with trust in creative process that will allow them to be a creative, perceptive, and attentive educator. It is about considering the arts beyond the classroom and considering them as I ask my students to: as a way of thinking. Being in creative process, enabled through the arts, develops needed sensibilities of attentiveness and responsiveness. Dewey (1916) says this type of teacher will "rise to the needs of the situation." Hansen's (2005) description is similar: "…creativity in teaching often manifests itself most vividly, if also subtly, in a kind of *ongoing* attentiveness…a dynamic combination of patience, listening, and initiative" (p. 57). These careful descriptions of what it means to teach creatively reflect what should be present in all teaching, in all disciplines, at all levels. The arts serve as a primary example of what it looks like and feels like to trust in creative process.

When the creative process can be described as a felt, genuine, aesthetic experience, the opportunities for interaction between content and learner become exponential. Relationships blossom between the self and its environment, the other, materials, context, curriculum, etc. When utilizing the creative process, teacher educators model the potential that education (and educators) hold in the learning experience. When students are invited to continually encounter the creative process, aesthetic experiences can become the norm, allowing for deeper meanings to take hold. Learning, school, education, becomes a world of creative opportunity that students are excited to be a part of not because they know they will be successful each step of the way, but because of the unending potential they believe themselves and the experience have to offer.

My own experiences as artist/researcher/teacher have provided extensive and evolving insights into how teaching, learning, and the creative process work – specifically within an arts classroom. However, this continued reflection has led my own teaching to take broader understandings of what it means to teach in a space, with students, and with care and attentiveness to the nuances of aesthetic experience. These qualities are present and have capabilities beyond the arts classroom. Growing and cultivating understandings of the presence of aesthetic experience has implications for learning and teaching at all levels of education, and for how we practice living on a daily basis. I now see my pre-service teachers as potential advocates. They are bearing witness to the transformative power of the arts and its potential within their own creative teaching/learning process. Their

stories are vital to how their future students will engage (or not engage) in/with the arts. I see my own role as a medium for telling their stories, and furthering what is possible through the arts in education.

Understanding curriculum as a creative, adapting, changing, building experience that positions students to enter learning as creators is important at every level of education. Helping pre-service elementary teachers grasp the complexity of the creative process and the benefits therein is of utmost concern as we see them move into their own classrooms and seek what they believe is best for their own students. We cannot expect as teachers that every student will walk away with a solid grasp of every nuance of subject content. What we can and should expect, however, is that they are building a teaching identity valuing the creative process and their capacity to move beyond the boundaries of what's been done, into what is possible. Exploring what pre-service teacher perceptions are in an arts methods course that is structured to encourage the evolution of the artistic self, is a positive step to understanding potential resistance and unfamiliarity with the creative process illuminating the potential for learning through trusting aesthetic experience.

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