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The Artist Teacher as a Reflective Teacher

Amber N. Logan

A thesis submitted to the faculty of
Brigham Young University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

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ABSTRACT

The Artist Teacher as a Reflective Teacher

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Master of Arts

The challenges of teaching include classroom management issues, lack of time, stress, and the constraints of core standards. In response to these challenges, I determined to change my attitude about being a teacher, become more reflective about my teaching practice and curriculum, and try to connect my artistic self to my teaching self. This thesis is an autoethnographic research of my own teaching practice designed to counter the challenges I was facing as a teacher. I wanted to become less reactive and more reflective about the challenges and rewards of being an artist teacher. This thesis is a reflection on my journey to find my own path toward professional growth and satisfaction through a careful study of my experiences teaching in a junior high school art room. In the end, this self-study has helped me become more flexible, understanding, and forgiving of myself as an artist and a teacher. I learned to allow myself to be flexible enough to let the research lead me in unforeseen directions and not fall into the trap of best practices. My attempt to apply some of my own artistic practices, such as in the use of materials, artists, and time constraints, to student projects was successful. I began by attempting to turn my teaching into my art practice; what I ended up doing was becoming a more reflective teacher.

Keywords: teacher challenges, self-study, reflective, artist teacher

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An Autobiographical Introduction

Because this thesis is closely connected to my personal reflections about teaching and artistry, I felt it important to begin with a reflective writing of my personal history. I contemplated my early life influences, personality development, and teaching journey. Each of these aspects of my life has led me to become the artist and teacher I am today. Connecting this self-study to my thesis is significant because how I became an art teacher and how this journey connects to my current teaching practice is an important influence on my teaching as a reflective art practice.

The History of the Heart

Whether I was sitting on my bed writing for the first time or editing for the 50th time, the process of writing my history has been difficult for me. My history itself isn't all that difficult to write, but the fact that I have to *write* is so hard for me. That is why I became an artist/art teacher, not an English teacher. I am terrible at expressing myself, including proper spelling and punctuation and anything else having to do with the English language. This difficulty could stem from the fact that I had cancer as a child, which resulted in serious-to-profound high-pitch hearing loss in both of my ears. My hearing loss is significant enough to warrant hearing aids, but when I first tried them in high school, they bugged the heck out of me. They were bulky, I couldn't put my hair behind my ears (since this is very important to do), and they were embarrassing, and the loud, extra-foreign noises were unbearable. Because of my hearing loss, I was slow at learning and understanding. I'm no scientist, but I'm sure learning was difficult for me because language is so important in development, and I couldn't make connections with the words, sounds, and pronunciations. I even developed speech impediments. Even now I learn something new about the English language every day, such as spellings of common words that I

should know or how to pronounce a word properly. My husband, either amused or flabbergasted, is usually the one who corrects me.

Over time I subconsciously trained myself how to read lips and learned other ways to mask or deal with my disabilities. Consequently, as I grew up, I became interested in things that I didn't need language for, such as creating or building with my hands. I was very spatially aware of my surroundings at a young age. As a child, I would tell my mother that she was going the wrong way when taking me to preschool. With a mixture of annoyance and humor, she would tell me that she had decided to take a different route.

I am a very sensitive person. I care deeply, almost too deeply, about others and making them feel loved and feel good. As a child, I really enjoyed making furniture for my Barbies and creating Lego houses. I never really played with the Barbies or Legos though; I just created things for them and then let them sit and get covered in dust. Even when my family moved from Michigan to Texas when I was in middle school, I insisted that my Lego city be transported in one piece in the van. When a tornado hit my bedroom a few years later and scattered all of my Lego creations, I had to take them apart and move on.

This is when I started to take a few art classes in high school. I enjoyed my art classes, but because I was a total band nerd whose time was completely taken up by marching band, I didn't think about my art classes very much. It wasn't until recently that I remembered that when I was invited to an event for being in the top 10% of my class, I chose to bring my art teacher, unlike my friends, who chose the band teachers. She must have had an effect on me. I remember connecting with her after I found out that she had cancer just like me. It was just skin cancer, but it was bonding nonetheless.

Throughout my childhood, and especially during high school, my mother encouraged me to pursue anything that made me happy. She especially, and almost annoyingly, praised me for my artwork. Since I have a bit of an OCD personality, I could only point out the imperfections of the things I made. I couldn't help, and occasionally still can't help, comparing myself to others and comparing my artwork to their artwork. In my mind, other artists were always so much better than me. When my mother would put me on a pedestal of greatness, I would get upset because I didn't believe it was true.

I had had this itch to travel for a long time. I had never been abroad, but I just knew traveling was something I needed to do. Therefore, when I learned about a study abroad program in England, Scotland, and Paris, I couldn't think about anything else. I begged my mother to let me go, and she was excited about the idea. The only downside was the focus of the trip. It was art. I was terrified. I wasn't good enough.

During my study abroad program, I saw the wonderful art that Europe has to offer. I was entranced by the ancient and the contemporary. I did drawing studies of statues in the Victoria and Albert Museum for hours and loved it. I quickly discovered that gathering and arranging found materials was my favorite on-the-go way to make art, and it is something I continue to do today. My colleagues on the trip were very supportive and suggested that I change my major and join them. I didn't feel the need to sell my art, so I decided that the next logical choice for an art career was art education.

Near the end of my bachelor's degree program, I once again had the itch to travel, this time to China. My practical, rational reason was, "I can student-teach in China during the summer, and then I can get a full-time job starting in the fall instead of the winter!" But this didn't go quite as planned. No one wanted to hire an individual they couldn't meet in person and

who technically wasn't done with her degree. Thank goodness, at the last minute, I was offered a teaching position. Despite that stress, I enjoyed China.

When I returned to the United States, I got a full-time job as an art teacher at an elementary school a week before school started, in August 2015. I taught special education in the morning and art in the afternoon. It turned out to be a less-than-ideal situation for me. In fact, that year was hell. Yes, the first few years of teaching are rough for every teacher, but it was really awful. I seriously considered quitting the job multiple times and thought about quitting teaching altogether. Several of my art projects didn't go as planned, and my patience was wearing thin, especially after a child tried to cut a ruler with scissors.

In the summer of 2016, I decided to head to Europe once again to visit England, Germany, and Italy. I visited extended family members and friends and made new friends. I relished once again the beautiful architecture, art, and history of these great countries. Toward the end of my trip, my grandpa was diagnosed with cancer, and I decided to come back early and help take care of my grandparents. I was the best person for the job since I was going to start teaching part time only fifteen minutes from their house.

This next position, also at an elementary school, wasn't special education. Later, in my first year of teaching junior high, I did work with some special needs students, and I wouldn't have known how to work with them if I hadn't had the background and respect I have for special education. My new elementary position was not full time and was art on a cart. Teaching with no classroom, moving supplies on a small cart from classroom to classroom, is stressful. I was frustrated having a part-time elementary position with no classroom and applied for many different high school and junior high positions with no luck.

I really enjoyed teaching at this new school because the principal and other teachers were supportive. Nevertheless, I had to become super-creative about my art on a cart. It was rough at first, but I got used to it. Finally, near the end of my second year of teaching elementary school, and near the end of my time living with my grandparents, I met my future husband and felt inspired to obtain a master's degree in art education. This set me on a new and happier path. This time around, my third year teaching, I had my own classroom and was thankful to continue teaching at such a great school with supportive administrators and teachers who appreciated the time and effort I invested in my job.

My third year of teaching, however, was challenging. I was organizing a new room, researching how I could improve as a teacher, changing lessons, keeping busy in my graduate program, and compiling my teaching portfolio for my level 2 license. As a newlywed, I was also stressed about money. We were running out of cash because we were paying for our schooling. I needed a full-time position to make more money and also wanted to teach older students who could do more complex projects. Thankfully, the secretary from my second year suggested my name for a position at the junior high, and the principal liked me! Now I would be able to do more interesting projects using more interesting materials than just colored pencils and construction paper.

My fourth year of teaching, starting at the junior high, which was the second year of my master's program, was also difficult, even though I was finally earning money and felt like I mattered as an art teacher. As an elementary art educator, I had felt looked down upon and would shy away from people who asked what I did for a living. I now have great respect for elementary teachers; I wish I hadn't been so embarrassed to be who I was. As a junior high teacher, however, I faced another set of challenges. I worked with several students from the school's

anger management unit and had to deal with several interesting situations I had never encountered before. Making seating assignments, adjusting art assignments/instructions, and modifying how I approached each of these students was very difficult. I had some good days and some very rough days. After discussing the situation with the anger-management teachers, I learned that these students had never been able to experience art in the way I had been teaching. Past teachers had not been able to work with these students, therefore art had never been an option for them. Because of my bond with these special education teachers, I learned how to work with these children that other teachers had given up on.

It was truly an amazing experience to reflect on how my teaching had changed during these short four years. I have jumped through many hoops to get to where I am today. Even though the process was hard, I am grateful for the learning experiences and wouldn't do it any other way. I have gained better understanding and patience these past four years and probably wouldn't appreciate these traits as much as I do if it weren't for this difficult journey.

My Art Contextualized with Current Art Practices

Because my art practice is such an important part of who I am as a teacher, it is important to review the development of my artwork. This self-study in correlation to my thesis has helped align my reflections on how I became an artist with how I feel about my current art and its connection to my teaching as a reflective practice.

Art Background

My love for creating goes back to a grandma who oil paints, a grandpa who builds with wood, other grandparents who write, a father who builds with wood and designs various forms of transportation, and a mother who drew and designed clothes when she was younger and now

collects furniture. Growing up in the presence of these influences helped build my need to make art.

Found materials. Through analyzing my work, I discovered one overarching theme: found materials. I have always collected materials and focused on the aesthetics of the material more than almost anything else. Since I was a child I have been collecting little trinkets I thought were beautiful. Now I collect metal, wood, acrylic, paper, and other objects I find on the street, on hikes, and at thrift shops, or objects that have been donated to me. I might collect a particular object because of its aesthetics, or where I found it, or the material itself. Sometimes I choose objects based on their availability, accessibility, and cost. I have collected items that were already constructed in order to create something new or to play with a new concept. I find satisfaction in finding and using the materials around me. I enjoy their authenticity and honesty. They are simple and are found everywhere. In my work, wood and paper represent nature, metal represents human manipulation, and acrylic and glass represent simplicity or heaven.

Using these found items, I create three-dimensional and two-dimensional mixed collages (Figure 1). Sometimes I like to mix elements together, and sometimes I like to lay them out in collections, as artists Mark Dion or Martin Parr do. Sometimes I create an assemblage or reliquary similar to the work of artists Robert Rauschenberg, Joseph Cornell, Varujan Boghosian, and Sook Jin Jo. Like Rauschenberg, I like to collaborate with my collected materials and the environment I find them in as they interact and play a part in my art. Under the overarching theme of found objects, my artwork can be broken down further into subcategories.



Figure 1. Childhood Doll House (2018)

Nature. I have always enjoyed nature, and it has long been a subject in my work. I created some of my work by gathering materials while on a walk, placing them together, and photographing them at home. Other work I created by manipulating materials to interact within the environment, creating new meaning through these combinations (Figures 2 and 3). Andy Goldsworthy creates similar ephemeral pieces where he “selects elements of nature and arranges them until they just exceed the limit possible for natural organization and enter into an irrefutable human ordering. By erasing traces of his own hand he heightens the affinity between his constructions and their setting and conceals the history of his intervention” (Metrick, 2003, p. 29).



Figure 2. Target Practice #1 (2018)



Figure 3. Red Dotted Line (2018)

Death. In several of my pieces, I reference death. Though I have not experienced the death of a loved one, I have come close to death myself. When I was diagnosed with cancer as a baby, I was given a 20% chance of survival. When I was a little older, I attended cancer survivor camps. Near the end of the week at camp, we would create boats, add lighted candles to them, and set them free on the water. This was a time of remembrance and contemplation of those who have passed while battling cancer. Even writing this now brings tears to my eyes. I still wonder why I survived when many others died.

My personal connection to childhood cancer and the historical value of water burials was a subtext for my work *Water Funeral* (2018; Figure 4). For the artwork I found dead animals and

gave them a proper water burial, which I believe they deserve, through video. I have learned that “the screen asserts itself as a sculptural object” (Mondloch, 2010, p. 15), not just as a vehicle for documentation. I found the lost animals at different points of decay while on nature walks and used found materials from nature to create boats. I placed the video, which “acts as a window onto a space of representation” (2010, p. 63), next to photographs of each animal burial boat and the smallest of the boats on display, creating a collection of sculptures as well as documentation of the event. The video is silent to encourage the viewer to be quiet, respectful, and contemplative of the burial and the time taken to create it. This melancholic event also portrays peace with the cool beautiful water and the idea that there is life after death.



Figure 4. Water Funeral (2018)

A contemporary artist who deals with human death is Felix Gonzalez-Torres. He produces work “of uncompromising beauty and simplicity, transforming everyday objects into

profound meditations on love and loss” (Rondeau, 1999, p. 84). Through contemplating the loss of someone close to him from a disease, Gonzalez-Torrez created *Untitled (Portrait of Ross in L.A.; 1991)* (Figure 5), an installation where the viewer could take a piece of candy representing the weight of his loved one, Ross, who died of AIDS. This work “contains ethics of the gaze” (Bourriaud, 2002, p. 167), where the actions or inactions of the viewer are part of the work. Other contemporary artists who work with animal death, such as Maria Ionova-Gribina and Emma Kisiel, also present beauty and peacefulness in their photography of dead animals.



Figure 5. *Portrait of Ross in L.A.*, Gonzalez-Torrez (1991)

Collage. A large portion of my work are collages. I began working in collage as a result of traveling and needing an easy way to create with little space, time, and resources. While traveling, I found many materials while walking around the streets I visited and also gathered images from old books. I compiled these collages in the same set sizes, around 9 inches by 12 inches, to address the practical considerations of picking up and moving to another location. To create continuity, each collage has half-inch or one-inch white borders.

These collages (Figure 6) are in company with pieces by artists Kurt Schwitters and Pablo Picasso, who work in layout style. According to the MoMA catalog, Schwitters's "collages touch on German Expressionism, on Cubism, on Dada, and on Constructivism, on the work of Bauhaus, and on the development of photomontage. . . . They can be strict and monumental, and they can be sly and very funny" (1985, p. 8). Mark Bradford's mixed-media collages (Figure 7) link my work to contemporary art because of the found paper used in the backgrounds and the use of maps in his work.



Figure 6. Explore Italy (2016)

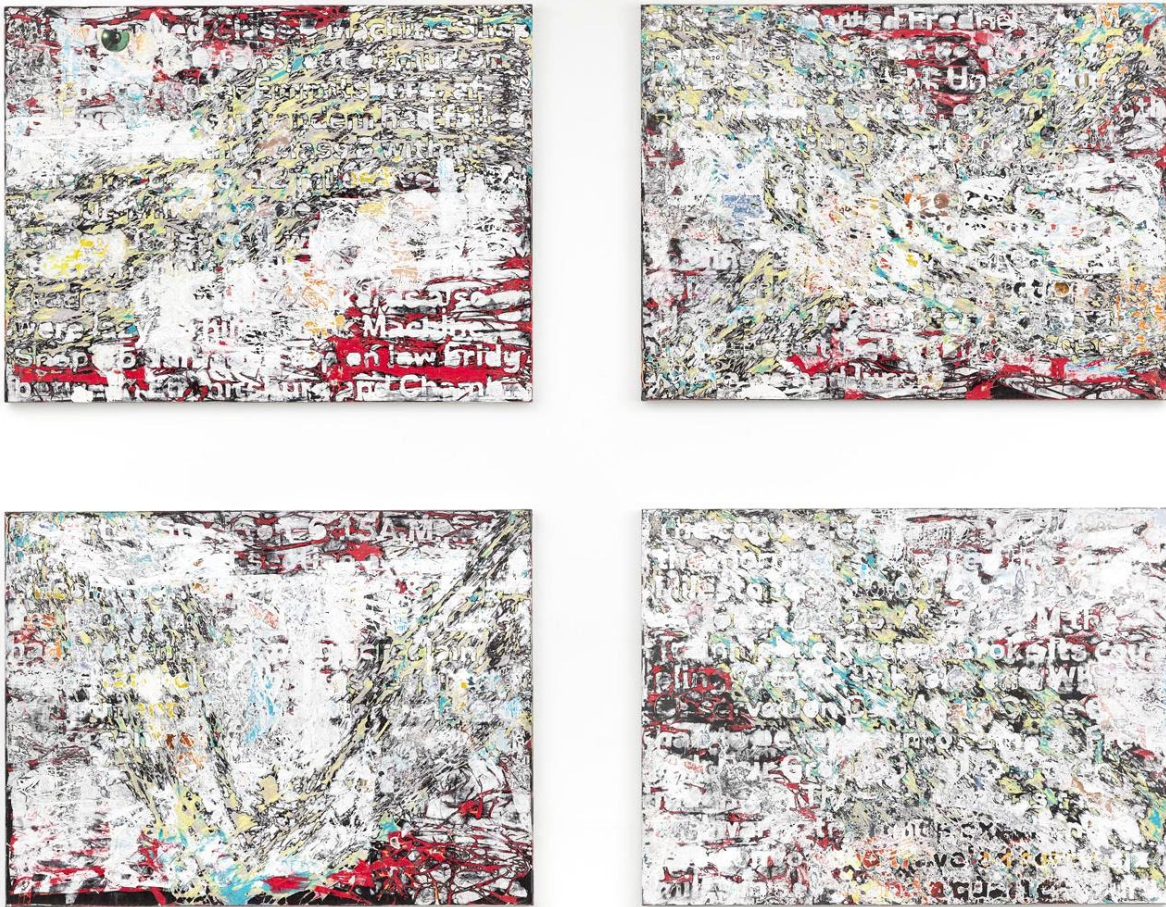


Figure 7. Journal Entry #1–4, Mark Bradford (2013)

Places and travel. Many of my collage pieces reflect areas I have visited, such as England, France, Italy, and China. My depictions of other countries were influenced by people I knew who lived in places such as South Africa or Brazil.

I was given a pile of old retired maps years ago and use them as the base of many of these collages. Regarding Mark Bradford's and Julie Mehretu's interpretation of maps, Kathryn Brown has said:

Instead of using the grid to construct a depersonalized space or to suggest an autonomous realm of art, both artists transform the pictorial and interpretative conventions associated

with the grid and suggest ways in which its figurative space can make visible diverse relations between individuals, communities, and the city. As a result, the grid becomes a dynamic structure capable of communicating a variety of subjective experiences of the urban environment. (2010, p. 102)

For my works, I studied the countries I was referencing by gathering ideas and materials from old books that fit each country. In the arrangements, I created a new map of the area. Some maps are simplified reflections of the countries in which the materials have more meaning (Figure 8), and some are much more complex and create a more abstract representation (Figure 9).

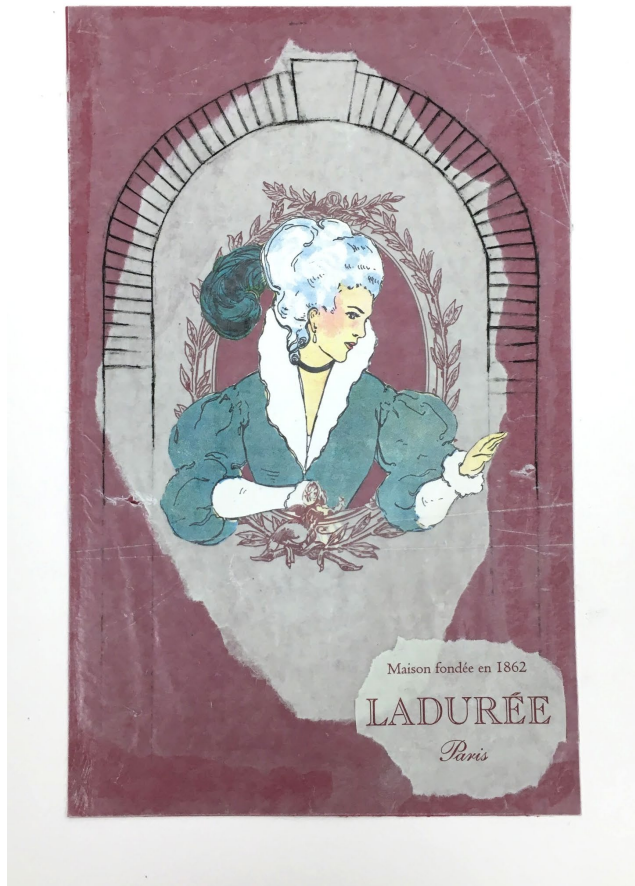


Figure 8. France (2013)



Figure 9. China (2015)

A few contemporary artists whose work uses symbolism related to other countries are Martin Parr, with photographs of tourists; Yinka Shonibare; with textiles/objects; and Marela Zacarias, with painted sculptures. Regarding symbolism, Shonibare's combination of African cloth and Dutch wax "is an apt metaphor for the entangled relationship between Africa and Europe and how the two continents have invented each other in ways currently overlooked or deeply buried" (Hynes & Picton, 2001, p. 60).

Simplicity in shapes. I enjoy working with simple geometric shapes. I often intertwine these shapes with organic natural shapes to create deliberate arrangements that are aesthetically pleasing to me. I like to place found objects outside or inside of acrylic cubes or rectangles (Figures 10 and 11). According to Mondloch, “Glass, architecture, three-dimensional objects, and so on can function as a screen and thus as a connective interface to another (virtual) space” (2010, p. 2), just as a video does. These acrylic shapes create screens into what is inside or outside to tell a story.



Figure 10. Think Outside the Box (2015)



Figure 11. Keep Out (2018)

Contemporary artists who reflect on the simplicity of materials and geometric shapes, such as Wolfgang Laib, Liz Larner, Zarouhie Abdalian, and Barbara Kasten, give context to my work. Wolfgang Laib “utilizes natural materials: milk, pollen, rice, and beeswax (among others) to convey their nourishing and purifying properties. His repetitive arrangement of rice and pollen echo the serial forms of Minimalism” (Jeffery, 2013, pp. 58, 65). I am working on a repetition series using materials in a similar way. With the juxtaposition of simple versus complex, this repetition of shapes and materials creates harmony and visual unity that adds visual interest for the viewer.

James Turrell uses light and simple shapes to create. I enjoy using simple acrylic geometric shapes that allow light to pass through. Similar to Turrell, I rearranged slides, found in my grandmother's basement, on top of each other, utilizing the physical aesthetics of the slides' layout (Figure 12) and the visual light aesthetics of the images when light shines through (Figure 13).



Figure 12. Untitled (2018)



Figure 13. Untitled (2018)

Juxtaposition of materials. I am drawn to the architectural elements of wood, metal, and acrylic. They are strong and convey nature, humans, and heaven. The interaction of natural materials, such as wood in juxtaposition to metal, is a common theme in my work. I have always been interested in humans' interaction with nature, whether it is humans taking over and strangling nature (Figure 14) or nature being turned into manmade things (Figure 15).



Figure 14. Strangled (2018)



Figure 15. Metal Tree (2014)

Contemporary artists who work with raw materials, such as Leonardo Drew, Richard Serra, and David Nash, are inspirations to me because of the simplicity of their materials and how the materials interact with each other or their environment.

Conclusion

Before starting the contextualization of my artistic work, I was feeling frustrated because I thought I had to fit into one neat box, which was confining. I thought that perhaps I wasn't a real artist. However, after contemplating and researching, I have realized that no artist fits into

just one box. They are all part of different dialogues happening at different points of time, some they likely didn't know they were contributing to until much later. Artists' styles change, and their ideas change; they don't belong to one movement or one medium. As a result of this inquiry and reflection, I have found a place for my artwork within various practices of contemporary art. I am excited to see where else I fit in the future.

CHAPTER 1

Introduction

I have always known I enjoyed art, but I never thought I could do art as a living. After attending an art study abroad program, I was convinced by my classmates to pursue art as a career. I decided to follow my love for art and also utilize my talent for helping others by pursuing a degree in art education.

Teaching art was often a pain. I was easily frustrated and felt lost in the profession. I had lost touch with my artistic soul. Soon after becoming an art teacher, I realized how much work it was to manage a classroom and prepare for my students. After teaching for three years in elementary school, I decided I would like to teach at a junior high so I could give my students more complex projects. I figured that classroom management would be easier and that my feelings of frustration would go away, but they didn't. While I have been able to plan fun lessons, teach more techniques, and really help my students progress and grow, I still face problems with classroom management, lack of time, and my feelings of being overwhelmed and tied down by core standards.

I was feeling lost in my profession. I wondered if I would ever get in the swing of it; would I ever enjoy myself? Teaching was my profession, not my life. I believed art could be my life, but it wasn't. After talking with several colleagues, I decided I needed to change, but I wasn't sure how. I finally found my niche after joining the Master of Art Education program at Brigham Young University. I wanted to be happier in my professional life. One of the reasons I was feeling frustrated was that I had to give my students so much structure to keep them working, interested, and invested. I found that I was comparing myself to other teachers who just have to give a prompt and the students are motivated enough to do the work on their own. This

was not how my classes worked, and I felt like I must be doing something wrong. Joining the Master of Art Education opened up new possibilities for me as an educator and educational researcher. Through the program I was introduced to a variety of classroom management approaches, project structures, and other ways to approach teaching. My experiences as a graduate student gave me a broader perspective on teaching and gave me opportunities to question my assumptions about teaching.

The challenges I experienced as a teacher included classroom management issues, lack of time, and stress. These are universal challenges for teachers. But, I also felt my artistic self was being ignored, and I was not satisfied with my experiences with teaching. Self-care is important in education (Ergas, 2017b; Noddings, 2006; Pinar & Grumet, 2014); therefore, my response to these challenges was to become more reflective about my teaching practice and curriculum and to try to connect my artistic self to my teaching self. I began by adjusting my curriculum and my teaching style to give my students more autonomy as they worked. I experimented with using different mediums, such as silk screen, and unconventional materials, like toys. I wanted to explore different classroom structures, curricula, and mediums. A key element of my study was using an autobiographical/autoethnographic inquiry both as a research methodology and as a strategy to navigate the difficult personal challenges I was facing as a teacher.

I began this project with some teaching role models in mind, such as Tino Sehgal and Jorge Lucero, whose art is a performance closely linked to everyday life. I am continuing to explore how to do this as a teacher. An important part of my study was an autobiographical exploration and description of my own lived experiences as a teacher and artist. I wanted to become less reactive and more reflective about the challenges and rewards of being an artist teacher. The idea of teacher self-care was an important theme in my study.

I was interested to see how changing my attitude, curriculum, classroom structure, and teaching style would affect my relationship with students. Would I be more inspiring to my students? Would these changes in my teaching and artistic practice change my feelings about teaching? How would these changes affect what I do in the classroom? How would they affect my interactions with students? This was an exploratory study. I didn't know where it would end up or what I would find out. It was also an evolving study, in which my questions changed during the course of the study. The process was about becoming a different kind of teacher and a different kind of artist. This thesis is a reflection on my journey to find my own path toward professional growth and satisfaction through a careful study of my experiences teaching in a junior high school art room. Through personal self-reflection, which guided the organization of the curriculum and my interaction with my students, I experienced a journey that hopefully will change me and my teaching practice forever.

CHAPTER 2

Review of Literature**Teaching Challenges and Teacher Burnout**

Teachers face many difficulties in the K–12 field today. The idea of teacher burnout is mentioned in a series of research papers edited by Vandenberghe and Huberman (1999).

Vandenberghe, a psychology and education professor at the University of Leuven whose research focuses on the process of change and improvement in educational settings, and

Huberman, an American psychology and education professor and member of the Swiss and American Educational Research Association, state:

“Burnout” was first investigated in the 1970s as a crisis of overextended and disillusioned human service workers. . . . For instance, through the greater demands on their time and energy, teachers are being pressed to do more work with fewer resources, while receiving fewer rewards and less recognition of their efforts. (1999, p. i)

Burnout is the state of feeling physically, mentally, and emotionally exhausted and is a result of ongoing, excessive stress (Lantieri, Kyse, Harnett, & Malkmus, 2016). Burnout is related to unreasonable workloads and work conditions (Struyven & Vanthounout, 2014), a sense of isolation (Robertson, 2017), decreased levels of autonomy and self-efficacy (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2010, 2017), and high levels of emotional energy (Goddard & Goddard, 2006) as a result of constantly dealing with challenging behaviors (Chang & Davis, 2009). Research shows that exhaustion and depersonalization—a sense of detachment from the job—are at the center of burnout (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2010).

Loss of recognition, fewer rewards, low wages, and fatigue weigh teachers down, and they end up enjoying teaching less and less (Mojsa-Kaja, Golonka, & Marek, 2015). Several

reports estimate that nearly 50% of teachers leave within the first five years (Alliance for Excellent Education 2004; Ingersoll, 2003).

In addition, teachers are often constrained by governmental restrictions and requirements. As Ergas explains, “The teacher education curricula gravitate toward compliance with external standards imposed by educational systems” (2017a, p. 220), which takes the joy out of learning and teaching. Teachers are told what to teach, when to teach, and sometimes even how to teach. Graham agrees, saying:

The organizational and curricular structure of many schools creates the expectation that teachers will simply transmit existing knowledge according to preset objectives and standardized curricula. This expectation is based on limited conceptions of knowledge and a lack of confidence in teachers. Neither students nor teachers are usually expected to be involved in the creation of new knowledge that has a communal, constructivist component. (2009, p. 88)

The joy of teaching is buried under professional obligations to transfer knowledge as a means of competing with others and gaining power over them (Sarason, 1999, pp. 51–54). This lack of freedom for teachers and students takes away “the awe, wonder, and curiosity about themselves, others, and the natural world that students had when they started school” (Graham, 2009, p. 86).

Moreover, teachers are often faced with the general public’s polarized ideas about the teaching profession. Outsiders may think that it’s okay if teachers work over time during the school year because they have summers off. In reality, teachers get paid only for the months they work (the paychecks can be distributed according to a 12-month schedule or a 9-month schedule). It is often frustrating to me to see this misconception. Dan Lortie explains:

Teaching seems to have more than its share of status anomalies. It is honored and disdained, praised as “dedicated service,” and lampooned as “easy work.” It is permeated with the rhetoric of professionalism yet features incomes below those earned by workers with considerably less education. It is middle-class work in which more and more participants use collective bargaining strategies developed by wage-earners in factories. (1975, p. 10)

The Art Educator Dilemma

Art educators face additional challenges, including restraints on their natural abilities to create because of the “rules, curricular designs, and classroom management that characterize traditional schooling” (Graham, 2009, p. 85). In addition, for art educators, “the aspiration to become a teacher in a K–12 school is viewed as both a lack of ambition and seriousness about being an artist” (Graham & Rees, 2014, p. 16). “Those who choose to make art for a living,” says Graeme Sullivan, “have an unmitigated need to create things that they believe sustains their very being” (2012, p. 17). This rings true for art educators as well. Many art educators “try to keep their artist side alive through making art ‘on the side,’ aside of their many teaching responsibilities” (Graham & Rees, 2014, p. 16) in order to gain accreditation with the outside art world. This attempt is a constant struggle to maintain their artistic identity because “school is seen as a sometimes rewarding but generally time-consuming detour from the art studio” (2014, p. 16). Those art educators who create credible art and maintain their artistic identity are often overlooked (Gee, 2004, pp. 130–133), even though they’ve managed to deal with the challenges of teaching, the conformity of the curriculum, and the lack of institutional support, all while creating their own artistic identity (Zwirn, 2006, pp. 167–175).

Sullivan explains the often-overlooked phenomenon of why artists choose to teach in the first place:

One enduring truth that is sometimes lost amid the rhetoric of justifying art education is the very reason why most of us found our way into the field in the first place. We were entranced by the experience of making art from a very early age, and, somewhere along the way, someone else valued what we did. Since then, most of us have felt the need to share our passion and so we became enamored by the opportunity to excite others about art. Yet this generous impulse can overwhelm us, absorbing our time and diverting our creative energies entirely toward teaching and away from making. I argue that something of the original impulse must be held in reserve, cherished, nurtured, and developed; the life of an art educator ceases to exist if the person stops making art. (2012, p. 17)

The belief and commitment to the “capacity of art to satisfy deeply felt human needs” (2012, p. 17) is one reason why artists become teachers. According to Sullivan, “Their mantra is the goal of immersing others in the experience of art” (2012, p. 17). In sum, “through personal passion and a profound appreciation of the importance of the creative and critical imagination in human development, art teachers take on a purposeful educational role so that young people continue to develop to their full potential as they grow. The challenge, then, is to keep growing as artists ourselves” (2012, p. 17).

Challenges Faced by the Teaching Artist

Among other challenges, growing as an artist is one of the most difficult for me. School is a constant task of putting out fires in large classrooms in which each student needs direct instructions that are often connected to a preconceived standardized curriculum. Yet, at the same time, the teacher must cater to each individual student’s needs. Graham says, “Failure as a

teacher is often framed in terms of classroom management and control” (2009, p. 78). After school, feeling fatigued, I rarely have the motivation or energy to create. One response to this feeling of insufficiency is to think about teaching and artistry differently. For example, Graham suggests, “Instead of thinking about teaching as a drain on creative energy and studio time . . . explore how it might overlap with or even become artistic practice” (Graham & Rees, 2014, p. 16). I wondered if this was possible in my own teaching.

Art teachers are sometimes looked down upon by artists or other professionals who think art teachers can’t be real artists if they don’t make and sell art as their main profession. James Rees describes the lack of respect many art educators experience: “As a college teacher, I find that many students studying art education have this same feeling of being a dual citizen and often feel that studio professors take them less seriously because of their teaching aspirations. After all, serious artists do not aspire to be teachers” (Graham & Rees, 2014, p. 16). Countering this social reaction to art educators, Graham states:

This denigration of teaching is troubling because of the ways it disregards the role of art in the education of children and how it devalues schools and teachers. It also runs counter to many contemporary art practices, which take a pedagogical turn that is socially engaged and conceptual. . . . [Therefore, treating the] teaching practice as a highly sophisticated art practice rather than an endeavor that is separate from art-making. (Graham & Rees, 2014, p. 16)

Schools, students, and teachers are all important in our society.

Teachers’ Self-Care

In Plato’s dialogue titled *Phaedrus*, Socrates claims, “I am still unable, as the Delphic inscription orders, to know myself and it really seems to me ridiculous to look into other things

before I have understood that” (qtd. in Hamilton, Cairns, & Cooper, 1961, pp. 229e–230a). For Socrates, the great conundrum is knowing oneself, which, to him, is the highest form of knowing but also the most challenging to grasp (Ergas, 2017a, p. 219). Philosophers such as Montaigne, Pascal, Goethe, and Nietzsche similarly believed in the import of shaping our sense of purpose and social-ethical living, a process that composes the pursuit of self-knowledge (Shusterman, 2012; Taylor, 1989). Throughout the 20th century and in contemporary curriculum theory, the importance of the self is expressed as central to education (Ergas, 2017b; Noddings, 2006; Pinar & Grumet, 2014); however, research has shown that the study of disciplinary knowledge and skills devotes little or a deficient amount of curricular time to exploring teachers’ interior lives (Hargreaves, 2000; Steel, 2014).

Elliot Eisner (1993) argues that we define education based on the education we have received. If a teacher experienced a study of disciplines and skills with little exposure to the self, such as who he or she is, then his or her image of education would not include the self (Ergas, 2017a, 2017b; Pinar & Grumet, 2014; Steel, 2014). Ultimately, a teacher’s “teaching can become a practice that creates a reproductive cycle that perpetuates the absence of self from education” (Ergas, 2017a, p. 219).

Parker Palmer (1998) asserts that teachers teach who they are, with Ergas continuing, “And who they are embodies an image of education that has little to do with who they are (i.e., self). . . . They may initiate their students into a continued nullification of self from education. Some of their students will become the next generation’s teachers who might continue this recursive cycle of social-reproduction” (Ergas, 2017a, p. 221). Robert Bullough, agreeing, adds to the discussion, stating, “What beginning teachers believe about teaching and learning and self-as-a teacher is of vital concern to teacher education; it is the basis for meaning-making and

decision making; teacher education must begin, then, by exploring the teaching self” (1997, p. 21).

In order to avoid the problem of the loss of self, Ergas concludes, “Teacher education programs that wish to adopt a self-orientation may have to embrace pedagogies that radically engage and challenge teachers’ images of education as they have been shaped by their own upbringing” (2017a, p. 222). This focus on the importance of the self led me to the process of self-evaluation and inquiry into how to include the self in education.

Connecting Teaching to Artistic Practice and the Teaching Artist

Teachers cannot give what they don’t have. If teachers themselves don’t have productive learning conditions, they cannot sustain them for their students (Sarason, 1997, pp. 366–369). Lack of resources and lack of time between preparing and teaching leaves little to no time for personal art-making. This is troublesome for many art educators. One way art educators can approach this dilemma is to change their mindset and become “teaching artists.”

According to Graham and Rees, “Teaching and artistry can be seen as competing roles, fighting for time and energy. But they can also be seen as complementary pursuits, where teaching informs artistry and art-making informs teaching. And they can even be seen as equivalent pursuits, where teaching is the artwork and art-making is teaching” (2014, p. 22). Sullivan agrees: “To continue to isolate what art teachers do from what artists do, or what art theorists do from what art practitioners do, has little rhetorical appeal and certainly no practical merit” (2012, p. 18). Many researchers believe that art-making is at the center of the research and teaching process (Biggs & Karlsson, 2011; Macleod & Holdridge, 2006; Smith & Dean, 2009; Sullivan, 2010).

What is a teaching artist? Teachers are constantly engaged in all kinds of social interactions, “but they rarely consider them as part of their artistic practice” (Graham & Rees, 2014, p. 16). The “everyday” as an artistic gesture is arguably dated back to Marcel Duchamp’s *readymade* artwork (Roberts, 2007). According to the socially engaged artist and teacher Jorge Lucero, “The conceptual artist determining *what is* and *what is not* art is a relatively old idea, but in art education it is an underutilized and under-recognized mode of operation” (2013, p. 24; italics in original). According to Graham and Rees (2014), referencing Lucero (2013), teaching as artwork is “a relational art that considers how the presence of the teacher alters students and how their presence alters the teacher. Instead of focusing on the transmission of content, the emphasis is on developing a perpetually evolving and transformative learning collective. Lucero calls this a pedagogy of nearness, full of unpredictability and improvisation. It is the making of shared history and constructing new ways of looking at and being in the world” (Graham & Rees, 2014, p. 23). Graham and Rees offer the possibilities associated with the mindset of becoming a teaching artist:

Perhaps school could also be viewed as an ideal stage for a creative, artistic practice and a generative place for the artist. Teaching could be viewed as a series of artistic encounters, presentations, and stage environments that give students permission to do things. The art teacher might use the methods and forms of pedagogy to create works of art that focus on relationality, participation, and social engagement. Perhaps teaching could be enacted as a form of contemporary art. The art teacher and artist might completely overlap as teaching practice transforms itself into artistic practice. (2014, p. 22)

These teaching artists are “developing a new culture where knowledge is an emergent phenomenon rather than a rigid set of facts delivered by teacher to student” (Graham & Moore, 2018, p. 10).

A teaching artist can also be an artist-researcher “who is driven by a profound belief in the importance of art as a means of inquiring into the world around us, with an understanding that making and encountering art is an intensely educational act” (Sullivan, 2012, p. 19). Sullivan argues:

Pursuing a relational research practice, artist-researchers engage directly with theoretical concerns that can be investigated in studio and classroom contents. Problem-finding, for instance, tends to draw together ideas and issues that emerge from situational factors, while meaning-making that occurs when creative links are made between informing theories tends to rely on broader interpretive and hermeneutical processes. (2012, p. 19)

These types of artistic practices can embody transformative art. They may include “an awareness that art can connect us, and it can change us. In other words, art is a creative and critical practice that has the capacity to transform individual and collective understanding” (2012, p. 18). Graeme Sullivan (2012) argues that the practices of art-making can be a relational and transformative mode of inquiry that diverge from mainstream research methods. Arts-based research can have more individual significance and connection to community. This art gesture can be considered a kind relational aesthetics (Bourriaud, 2002). It requires an artist who constructs social experiences as art-making.

Graham praises the teaching artist’s work because it can provide an antidote to overly prescriptive curricula by making spontaneity, imagination, and creative production a central part of teaching and learning. The dynamics of school

are dramatically altered as the classroom becomes a studio, teaching becomes a playful conversation, and knowledge becomes something that is explored and constructed collaboratively. . . . [Teachers'] personal artistic activities can have a profound influence of on how they interact with students, how they shape the learning environment, and how they interpret their field of knowledge. (2009, p. 93)

When teachers change their viewpoint regarding their profession, “teaching becomes more about cultivating an environment or social context where the teacher’s experience and interests intersect with students’ backgrounds, needs, and interests” (2009, p. 91). This environment can foster creativity and exhibits

a dynamic balance between chaos and order, chance and intention, solitude and communion. [It] provide[s] opportunities for ideas to bump into each other, and for experimentation, awareness, and playful exchanges. Innovative environments tend to be a little chaotic. It is not a process of matching answers to someone’s questions; instead, it is a matter of questioning and messing around with a lot of spare parts. (Graham & Moore, 2018, p. 12).

By not falling into the constraints of the traditional teaching vision of keeping the class under control, the curriculum emerges as an adventurous experience and a collaborative research project (Rinaldi, 1993, pp. 101–113). Open constraints allow for “a balance between structure and openness to allow diversity of interests on what might be done” (Davis et al., 2008, pp. 192–195) and can create “a dynamic between teacher and students that value[s] student interests and experience and provide[s] opportunities for students to negotiate their own response to artistic problems” (Graham, 2009, p. 91). Graham suggests that “liberating constraint creates conditions for the emergence of complex learning and complex learning communities by balancing

sufficient organization with sufficient openness to allow for a diversity of interests and experience among students” (2009, p. 91). Enabling open constraints in the classroom can provide “an instructional framework for teacher and students to work collaboratively on the conceptual and technical aspects of the work” (2009, p. 91), which in turn creates more meaningful art. Everyone, including the teacher, becomes not just a student in an art class but part of an experimental community, always trying new things and thus developing a culture that encourages experimentation and the toleration of failure (Shirky, 2010). Borrowing from Judith Butler’s belief, Daniel Barney likes to conceptualize teaching (Francis, Graham, & Barney, 2018, p. 83) as “an improvisation within a scene of constraint” (Butler, 2004, p. 1). Barney (2009) and Rollins (2006) believe that constraints can be used as an opportunity, and instead of limiting our outcomes, they can engender possibilities.

Art Education, Student Autonomy, and Mastery

The authors of *The Teaching Artist Handbook*, Nick Jaffe, Becca Barniskis, and Barbara Hackett Cox, have made an extensive study of teaching artists. Their work provides practical instructions for how an artist can be an effective teacher. They believe that assuming that all artists work the same way—such as “all oil painters start in the same way with small studies, then paint, then get feedback from fellow peers, then paint some more, draft an artist statement, etc.” (2013, p. 24)—is not true. They claim that “such schematization and overemphasis on process can interfere with a student’s ability to develop his or her own processes, either based on or in reaction to established methods. In order to develop original work in a medium, you do have to have a sense of the processes of the past, but you also need room to modify or even replace them” (2013, p. 24). They conclude that “we need to come up with some way to

communicate general ideas about process that are useful to a range of students” (2013, p. 24).

They warn of falling into the trap of “best practices” because

when we begin to throw around the notion of best practices, we are suggesting a kind of standardization that trivializes the all-important specificity of context: the individual teaching artist, the individual students, the medium. While some may use the term simply to suggest some basic tried and true techniques . . . the term confers upon such teaching lore—which is seldom useful to apply uncritically—the status of expertise. (2013, p. 82)

In *Drive*, Daniel H. Pink suggests that “the opposite of autonomy is control.” He believes that “control leads to compliance [and] autonomy leads to engagement,” which then leads to “mastery—the desire to get better and better at something that matters” (2009, pp. 108–109).

When designing an assignment, Pink suggests that teachers ask the following questions:

Am I offering students any autonomy over how and when to do this work? Does this assignment promote mastery by offering a novel, engaging task (as opposed to rote reformulation of something already covered in class)? Do my students understand the purpose of this assignment?” (2009, p. 186)

Pink states that “our beliefs about ourselves and the nature of our abilities . . . determine how we interpret our experiences and can set the boundaries on what we accomplish” (2009, p. 118). He believes that “mastery is a mindset” (2009, p. 119). According to Pink, “Intelligence is something you can increase . . . something you can develop,” and life events can “become opportunities for growth” (2009, p. 119).

In response to these ideas, I realize that I need to keep in mind the fact that intelligence is developed and then create opportunities for students to develop intelligence and mastery.

Mastery requires effort over a long period of time. Pink states, “One of the best ways to know

whether you've mastered something is to try to teach it" and suggests that we "turn students into teachers" (2009, p. 196).

Teacher Anxiety and Creativity

Many teachers encounter the lack of room, lack of support, and lack of respect I have experienced in the classroom and share my concerns: "Am I good enough?" "Can I really teach art?" Olivia Gude suggests that "anxiety is a necessary component to a truly creative experience" (2010, p. 36). Bart Francis, regarding a particular student's anxiety about creating artwork, says that "his anxiety seemed to lead to doubt, which in turn led to inaction" (Francis et al., 2018, p. 80). Brené Brown, with whom Bart Francis agrees, says that "the most valuable and important things in my life came to me when I cultivated the courage to be vulnerable, imperfect, and self-compassionate" (Brown, 2012, p. 128; see also Francis et al., 2018). Francis remarks, "My notions of what it meant to be a teacher were challenged as I reflected on why I was so nervous to share these vulnerabilities with my class. I had adopted the notion of a teacher as infallible, as someone who always knows. This definition is as constraining as it is flawed" (Francis et al., 2018, p. 81). Francis, wanting to help those with this flawed view, comments, "It is tempting as a teacher to try to remove feelings of not knowing and anxiety from the classroom by supplying a prescribed list of instructions that are fail-proof" (2018, p. 82). Expressing similar concerns about knowing your subject, Graham has stated, "I often think that I need to be working hard, to be performing in front of the class, to be in control. I need to know the answers and to be the master of art-making, instruction, or learning" (qtd. in Francis et al., 2018, p. 79).

After completing a personal study wearing an apron that read "Pretender" while teaching, Francis said that "pretending to be an artist and teacher shifted from being a weakness into a strength. . . . Rather than being the all-knowing sage, I am a teacher who is continually learning

with my students as I reflect on what it means to be a teacher and an artist” (2018, p. 82).

Teachers like Bart Francis remind me that I am not alone in my teaching anxiety and insecurities and that they may, in fact, be an inherent part of the process.

Play in the Classroom

To help combat the anxiety of teaching, Graham has presented the idea of play in the classroom. He states that “play may be a key to understanding how people learn and how artistry and scientific thinking are linked” and explains that “play is important for the teacher as well as the students” (2009, p. 89). Being willing to work alongside the students to create art and letting them go through the playful process of “the imagined, mythical worlds of the artist provides new insights into the deeper meanings and purposes of life. Artistry can transfigure information into something meaningful, allowing us to glimpse new and unforeseen possibilities” (2009, p. 89).

Olivia Gude (2013) and Ackerman (1999) have observed that artists often work in open spaces of creativity, ambiguity, illusion, personal story, and play. A possible curriculum adjustment might be to have an open-studio art room that encompasses the idea of play. Graham believes that the “studio classroom is important and often resists the limitations school imposes on time by making it open after class, for lunch, or after school. The studio can be a refuge, a place to have conversations, and a place to work on things students and teachers care about” (2009, p. 93). He argues that “the art studio attempts to shake off the institutional character of the classroom in order to encourage the kind of hybrid collaborations where student interests can meet teacher interests” (2009, p. 93). “When a classroom becomes an art studio,” states Graham, “evidence of thinking and learning are visibly displayed, making learning into a communal enterprise. It is no longer an indifferent space that is interchangeable with any other place; rather,

the room itself becomes a rich source of learning” (2009, p. 92), and as Gandini (1997, pp. 14–23) says, this space becomes a place that fosters communication and relationships.

Regarding the theory of play, Ackerman (1999) believes that playful artistry can be absorbing, exuberant, intense, and transcendent. It can be a refuge from the mundaneness of everyday existence. Csikszentmihalyi (1996) believes that play includes freedom but also incorporates rules. Therefore, a classroom approach that focuses on play does not need to be without structure. This approach includes imagination, risk, unanticipated outcomes, and opportunities for students to become completely immersed in the art process (Csikszentmihalyi, 1996). This play can help teachers contextualize their own artistic experiences and ask questions such as, “How do we teach students to value or notice their own experiences, as a legitimate field for art making?” (Graham & Rees, 2014, p. 19) This questioning helps teachers provide opportunities for students to discover on their own.

Oliver Herring’s TASK party is a good example of play and how it changes the creation of art. TASK participants are asked to write down a task and submit it to the TASK box and then to take a new task and interpret it in any way they want using materials in or around the area. This art creates social interactions among people that in turn become Herring’s artistic medium. This art gesture can be done in any space at any time, especially in the art room.

Artist Alberto Aguilar has “intertwined art/life practice [and] proposes that a teacher’s tasks—even the mundane and arduous ones—can be moved around, played with, presented, and theorized as sophisticated contemporary art practice” (Lucero, 2013, p. 26). Aguilar has managed to turn every aspect of everyday life into an art practice. He integrates his artistic, physical, familial, spiritual, personal, and professional sides into his constantly evolving art practice (2013, p. 31). Sometimes he enacts his artwork through performances, such as in meetings, interviews,

and social exchanges, and in activities like organizing parties or cooking (Lucero, 2013). Aguilar offers tips for integrating art into everyday life, including, “Make work at work.” He says, “Think of your students and co-workers as collaborators. Your office is your studio. It makes being at the office more exciting and you will invest more of yourself into it” (2013, p. 31). Another tip he suggests is creating an experience instead of spending money. An experience such as going on a “pizza parade” along the main business street of your neighborhood, tasting and finding the best pizza, could easily be transferred to the art classroom.

Curriculum, Teaching, and Artistry

How can art teachers connect their classrooms with their art practice? In order to explore this question, it is important to remember that “case studies of teaching artists reveal very different ways of reconciling the roles of artist and teacher” (Graham & Rees, 2014, p. 19). Rees describes teaching art as “*pick up sticks*, a game of balance and connection. It is hard to pull one idea out without pulling everything else apart in the process. *Pick up Sticks*, as a metaphor for what we do as teachers and artists, implies both interconnectedness and fragility” (2014, p. 15). Therefore, ideas emerge and build as the class progresses, fostering curriculum adjustments and possibilities.

Olivia Gude (2013) believes that it is too easy in the K–12 grades to present medium-based projects or modernist ideas that have been mashed up into premade lesson plans. Aguilar suggests that instead of just showing students famous artwork and assigning projects, teachers should volunteer to make art alongside the students (Lucero, 2013, p. 31). Graham, who also agrees that artwork and teaching are too often “tied to mediums and artistic conventions of drawing and painting” (Graham & Rees, 2014, p. 16), assumed the role of the artist in the classroom (Graham, 2009, p. 90). This change in his teaching style demonstrated the process of

trial and revision, showing students that things can go wrong, that their teacher is still learning by doing, and that their teacher can be more than an expert critic. This ultimately helped Graham to stop imposing his own personal inclinations on his students' work (2009, p. 90).

Since an art teacher is still an artist, it is crucial to incorporate how artists create into the classroom in order to facilitate learning. Daniel Barney says that doing so "can help students learn to think and act and respond as if they are artists," look at affordances and limitations, and see "how practices are contextually relevant" (qtd. in Graham & Moore, 2018, p. 10). Artists constantly challenge established rules while they are creating and often make wrong decisions, which can seem like a disaster or failure (Dadich, 2014). Therefore, giving students the opportunity to act and think like artists, including making mistakes, can allow them to have a more meaningful artistic process.

Bart Francis talks about curriculum considerations for "not knowing." Instead of just instructing the class on what they do know, artist teachers can explore new mediums, techniques, or concepts with his or her students, "plunging into the depths of the unknown" (Francis et al., 2018, p. 80). Not knowing forced Francis and his students to research and learn things outside of their comfort zone (2018, p. 80). Since teachers can't control curriculum outcomes, the curriculum "becomes an emergent phenomenon as students and teacher improvisationally respond to the constraints given, including those inherent in a school system" (2018, p. 84). Barney reflects on this classroom adjustment by stating:

Art as a methodology for inquiry interests me far more than teaching specific technical skills for very specific and predetermined outcomes. Art is an amorphous discourse and practice, not simply an object to be studied, interpreted, or created. Art is a process of knowing, understanding, and entertaining possibilities. It is a verb, a transformative

methodology of coming to know and becoming, . . . where problem posing is as valued as problem solving. (2018, p. 84)

Teachers can also “create openings to the wildly unpredictable world of art and visual culture by what they bring into the classroom, and by what they allow students to bring” (Graham, 2009, p. 93). This transformative methodology of teaching art can be described as “complexity theory.” Complexity theory posits that learning is a complex, dynamic ecosystem that is defined by feedback, boundaries, and possibilities. These systems are focused on possibility and not on a specific goal because of the characterization of constant change, elaboration, and play (Davis, Sumara, & Luce-Kapler, 2008).

In line with play and constant change with no fixed outcome, Tino Sehgal’s work *This Progress* was composed of a series of stimulating encounters in the Guggenheim museum. Different actors walked with visitors up the museum’s staircase, engaging them in conversation, then passed them off to another actor who engaged them in further conversation as they progressed along their journey. The conversations loosely followed a script but were molded according to the needs of the visitor. Graham recounts his experience of Sehgal’s work:

Sehgal’s work exists, or does not exist, as a performance, as a legend, or an idea that is documented by recollection. It is the deliberate provocation of conversation, dialogue, and implied gesture that makes the work so overtly pedagogical. It is also pedagogical in what it gives us permission to do, which is to broaden our view of the everyday as something imbued with deeper significance and meaning. It encourages the viewer to consider the world differently and perhaps to participate in the world differently. The question is not how it felt, or how it went, but how can it keep going. (Graham & Rees, 2014, p. 21)

Graham describes this experience as a “provocative similitude of teaching” (2014, p. 21), meaning that classroom social interactions are useful and can be art. Teachers may have an idea of what they want to talk about or do in the classroom, but they need to experience learning with their students and be ready for the unknown teaching experiences that might occur.

Graham also recounts his own experience of how interacting with Mark Dion and learning about other artists changed his view as an artist. Mark Dion changed Graham’s idea of collecting as an art form, and Fred Wilson added the role of curator of collections and student work to his definition of art. Graham explained that these experiences altered his teaching practice because he knew that not all students enjoy traditional media such as drawing and painting. It gave him “a broader perspective on what can be considered art” and gave his “students permission to explore many other aspects of artistry” (Graham & Rees, 2014, p. 18). Through looking at contemporary artists whose work is conceptual, collaborative, and pedagogical, teachers can change their approach to projects in ways that fit into the classroom.

Graham also explains that medium expertise may come from other types of experiences that happen outside of the classroom, such as watching a YouTube video. Therefore, keeping an open mind about when, where, and how students obtain information and creating an open space for them to transfer that information and discuss ideas can help teachers alter their curriculum to better fit their students.

The artist Gabriel Orozco, for example, “often does not have a studio, eschewing its isolation to work in other places, such as in the street. When he could not spend time in the studio, he constructed an art practice from other things he was doing. Sometimes, this is an ephemeral art where not much is made in the way of objects” (Graham & Rees, 2014, p. 22). This may be a solution for teachers who don’t always have time to create in a studio; their

experiences can become their work. Another artist, Nicki S. Lee, “explores disparate subcultural identities by integrating herself into selected communities” (Graham & Rees, 2014, p. 22). Lee would live the life of a musician, a yuppie, a tourist, and an elderly woman for as short as days or as long as months.

Exploring social interactions as art, Jorge Lucero believes that his JORGELUCEROSTUDYCOLLECTION displayed in his office is about “collecting as suspension for the sake of studying; and as a potentially allegorical object” (Lucero & Lewis, 2018, p. 82). He liked the challenge of turning his office into a place to make art. He “felt that working out of an office was in line with the way that [he had] been thinking about how to make art out of and through one’s teaching practice. [He] also wanted to stay away from the romance of the studio.” He wanted to “introduce questioning, conversation, collaboration, play, and collage as forms of contemplative behavior” by opening up his office to the public for visits once a week (2018, p. 82). His art was his connection and conversation to those who would visit his teaching sphere of influence.

In building an art curriculum, teachers should focus on the students’ best interests. A teaching artist is open to emerging social interactions within the classroom, entering the unknown results of these social interactions as a way to build and alter his or her curriculum. The literature I reviewed describes curriculum adjustments that include having an open art studio that encompasses the theory of play. This has the potential to benefit my classroom by giving students more freedom to express their artistic yearnings, engage in meaningful conversations, and participate in other parts of the artistic process. Regarding these artists, Graham suggests that art teachers can “use the methods and forms of pedagogy to create works of art that focus on relationality, participation, and social engagement. Perhaps teaching could be enacted as a form

of contemporary art. The art teacher and artist might completely overlap as teaching practice transforms itself into artistic practice” (2014, p. 22).

The literature also offers great examples of artists who practice relational aesthetics with their work and how they can translate into an art classroom. What is lacking, however, is evidence of the long-term positive effects the teaching artist’s curriculum has on students. As the idea of a teaching artist is a relatively new concept, and one that must be explored personally between the teacher and students, it may not be well represented in the literature. Since the nature of this topic of research is qualitative and not quantitative, the data would be difficult to attain and to sustain through years after the initial art gesture in the classroom.

Summary

Educators, including art educators, deal with many frustrating situations, including the constraints of a predesigned curriculum and a lack of respect, time, and resources. These challenges can cause teachers to become disenchanted with the profession. Teacher burnout is a serious problem within the profession, which I have experienced personally. Art educators who try to keep their art practice alive have the additional burden of trying to combine the roles of artist and teacher. The idea of the teaching artist is an important idea in theory but often is very difficult to put into practice. A substantial amount of research literature describes the challenges of teaching and offers possible remedies, which I have referenced as I have sought to redefine my own teaching and my own artistry within my teaching.

CHAPTER 3

Methodology

This chapter describes how self-study can be a component of autobiographical or autoethnographic research and how action research can help art teachers become more reflective and effective in their profession.. The rationale for this approach is that a reflective and effective art teacher gains personal satisfaction, offers a better student experience, and finds purpose in teaching. This thesis is largely about the challenges I have faced as a teacher, particularly classroom management issues, lack of time, and the stress of not meeting my own ideals as a teacher. In response to these challenges, I became more reflective about my teaching practice and curriculum and tried to connect my artistic self to my teaching self. I used an autobiographical exploration of my own lived experiences as a teacher and artist, artist research, student feedback, student projects, and intense self-reflection to approach these challenges. My original research questions were (a) How does the process of reflecting on my teaching change my overall satisfaction, perspective, attitude toward teaching, sense of personal growth, and disposition toward school? (b) What actions did I take that influenced these reflections? and (c) How does connecting my artistic self to my teaching practices influence my sense of success or personal satisfaction?

Methodological Summary

Autobiography and autoethnography are important to my area of research because the subjects of my inquiry are my own teaching and responses to teaching. These research methods allow the researcher to focus on reflection, introspection, and the relationships between personal experiences and the practicalities of teaching. First, I reflected on my personal history through the autobiographical lens of self-study. I also reflected on my current art practice and explored

where I feel I fit in the contemporary art world. Through autoethnography, taking a mindfulness approach in the care of myself, I reflected on my personal experience in relation to my students and their experience in the classroom through daily pre- and post- journaling. Each day and week, I reflected on similar questions about emotions, failures, and successes and allowed time for miscellaneous, open-ended journaling. I also reflected on my own curriculum and teaching through observations of student artwork and responses to classroom projects. One purpose of this project was to improve my personal self-care as I participated in this labor-intensive reflective process designed to help me grow in the demanding profession of teaching art.

Methods of Gathering Data

My self-study was focused on my lived experience with students in my ninth-grade Foundation II art class. I completed daily reflective notes using Google forms to capture my emotions and motivations before and after class. *The Teaching Artist Handbook* explains, “If one never takes the time to write down what happened, and thus what *could* happen again, then it becomes hard to focus on what worked and why, and what could be better” (Jaffe et al., 2013, p. 8). Before class, I answered the following questions: How am I feeling today? What do I expect today? How might I shift or change today’s class from the previous periods? What are my goals for the day? After class, I wrote about impressions or feelings and goal fulfillments. I then read student reflections and wrote about what I could do better.

On Friday after school, I reflected in my end-of-week journal. I began by writing for fifteen minutes about events that happened, why those events happened, and how I felt about what happened and included other open-ended thoughts about the week. This allowed me to fill in the thoughts and feelings I may have left out or forgotten during the week. I agree with Julie Castro’s (Becoming a Teacher Educator, 2008) suggestion to have an organic end-of-week

reflection as well as a structured end-of-week reflection. The consistency of answering the same questions repeatedly helped me see change when analyzing the weekly reflections. I wrote for 30 minutes, responding to questions similar to the questions offered by Castro: What have I learned about myself as an artist? What did I do well this week as an artist/art teacher? What could I have done better? What was the hardest part of the class this week? What was the most rewarding? How has my classroom changed?

Autobiographical/Autoethnographic Research Methodologies

Meijer, Korthagen, and Vasalos believe that in order to strengthen teachers' capacity to "feel like themselves" as they teach and improve their teaching, teachers must expand their awareness of self (2009, p. 301). However, a teacher can become more aware of him- or herself but still not be an effective teacher, particularly if he or she doesn't address needed changes. This problem can be resolved by utilizing critiques or input from external sources. Education researchers offer many ways to perform self-reflections.

Whether in regard to teachers or students, the process of being aware is similar and can include practices such as journaling. In his case study "Reclaiming 'Self' in Teachers' Images of 'Education' through Mindfulness as Contemplative Inquiry," Ergas had his students complete a 14-session course on mindfulness. He believes that mindfulness brings "students [to] ground themselves in the present" (2017a, p. 228). During the course, students kept a weekly journal. They were asked to journal before and after each mindfulness practice they completed in class and at home, after which they would answer a set of questions stemming from their practice. For their final project, students were asked to write a 2,000-word essay about whether and how their understanding of the "self" and "education" changed as a result of practicing mindfulness as contemplative inquiry (2017, p. 223). Ergas believed that the accumulation of the notes from

their journal would help each student build an autobiography that would depict who he or she was before the practice, who he or she was during the practice, and who he or she was after the practice (2017, p. 223).

Joan Didion has said that “we tell stories in order to live” (1979, p. 11). Telling autoethnographic stories is another way to create awareness of the self. According to Adams, Holman Jones, and Ellis, “Autoethnographic stories are stories of/about the self told through the lens of culture. Autoethnographic stories are artistic and analytic demonstrations of how we come to know, name, and interpret personal and cultural experience” (2015, p. 2). Jacqueline Allen-Collinson characterizes autoethnography as an engagement of self “in relation to others, to culture, to politics, and the engagement of selves in relation to future possibilities for research” (2013, p. 282). Through autoethnography, we confront “the tension between insider and outsider perspectives, between social practice and social constraint” (Reed-Danahay, 2009, p. 32). In *Autoethnography*, authors Adams, Holman Jones, and Ellis (2015), who cite the following researchers, assert that a researcher uses his or her personal encounters to express and analyze cultural beliefs, practices, and experiences (Ellis, 2004); reviews and understands important bonds with others (Barton, 2011, pp. 432–445); shows “people in the process of figuring out what to do, how to live, and the meaning of their struggles” (Bochner & Ellis, 2006, p. 111); keeps scholarly and learned precision, passion, and ingenuity in harmony (Ellis, 1991, pp. 23–50); and seeks for communal fairness to build a better life (Adams, 2012, pp. 181–194).

Tiffany Stanfield wrote an autobiographical self-study thesis titled *An Autobiographical Self-Study of Teaching and Learning: Exploring the Contexts, Successes, and Struggles as an Educator*. Using her personal journals, past lesson plans, classroom records, and other memos, Stanfield wrote a history of her teaching years up to that point. In this study she “(a) explored the

depth of detail and explanation provided in each critical event, (b) probed for deeper meanings and connections between events, (c) examined shifts in [her] personal and professional image and behavior, and (d) developed themes that capture the meanings of the contexts, struggles, and successes of [her] teaching career thus far” (2002, p. 12). Through this process she discovered shortcomings that became passageways for “seeking new growth and development and revealed how [her] personal weaknesses hindered [her] professional development” (2002, p. 12).

Reflecting on these weaknesses helped her improve her practice.

An Overview of Self-Study

Self-study is similar to autobiographical study, in that it reflects on the history of the person writing it, and to autoethnography, which includes the culture of schooling, but it requires more intense reflection on current or future events as well as outside influences. As mentioned in Chapter 2, truth is relative for individuals as they construct understanding and participate in, interpret, and make meaning of their experience (Fosnot, 2005; Goodman, 1978; Greene, 1995; Lakoff & Johnson, [1980] 2003; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Bullough and Pinnegar have stated, “Self-study points to a simple truth, that to study a practice is simultaneously to study self: a study of self-in-relation to other” (2001, p. 14). Autobiographical self-studies should ring true, enable connection, and present a fresh perspective on these established truths. This kind of research cannot be generalizable; rather, it is designed to present fresh truth and connect inner experiences with observed phenomenon. Self-study is relatively new as a research methodology in teacher education and Teachers are constantly evaluating and researching, which is a natural human instinct (Miller, 1990), and since teacher development is the essence of teacher reform (Bullough & Baughman, 1997), self-study can be an important part of a teacher’s professional development.

According to Bullough and Pinnegar, “Who a researcher is, is central to what the researcher does” (2001, p. 13). Through a self-study of my own art teaching practice, I investigated ways in which I could transform my teaching into my art practice. My method is consistent with Mills’s idea that “every man [is] his own methodologist” (1959, p. 123) and “that methods must not prescribe problems; rather, problems must prescribe methods” (1959, p. 72). As mentioned previously, teachers often become fatigued and find themselves enjoying their job less and less (Mojsa-Kaja et al., 2015). I had fallen into this trap, and I felt the need to expand my views and feelings to see if I could improve my art practice and enjoy teaching more.

At the beginning of my self-study, I constructed three research questions: (a) How does the process of turning my teaching into my art practice change my outlook and my students’ outlook on overall satisfaction, perspective, personal growth, and disposition in school? (b) What actions can I take to influence this fragile perspective on teaching? and (c) What does this becoming look like? Once I had completed the self-study, I realized I was not turning my teaching into my art as I thought I would. Although these initial questions were not fully connected to my final research, they were still an important part of my reflection journey, which transformed into more of a reflection and response to teaching, my well-being, and my students’ well-being. As a result, my research questions changed slightly to (a) How does the process of reflecting on my teaching change my overall satisfaction, perspective, attitude toward teaching, sense of personal growth, and disposition toward school? (b) What actions did I take that influenced these reflections? and (c) How does connecting my artistic self to my teaching practices influence my sense of success or personal satisfaction?

As Bullough and Pinnegar have stated, “Ultimately, the aim of self-study research is moral, to gain understanding necessary to make that interaction increasingly educative” (2001, p.

15). Max Van Manen explains that “lived experience descriptions are data, or material on which to work” (1990, p. 55). Based on Van Manen’s idea that being “aware of the structure of one’s experience of a phenomenon may provide the researcher with clues for orienting oneself to the phenomenon and thus to all the other stages of phenomenological research” (1990, p. 57), I believed that thoroughly reflecting on the day before and after school would help me enjoy teaching more. These reflections would, in turn, influence my continual action research past this first initial study.

My Self-Study

Billings and Kowalski stress the importance of journaling in self-reflection, saying, “Journaling is a versatile strategy that can be used at various points in the teaching-learning process” and “involves more than asking learners to put their thoughts on paper—it is a structured activity selected to facilitate or evaluate the attainment of specified learning outcomes” (2006, p. 104). Attempting to shift from teaching art as a job to teaching art as my personal art practice, I reflected on Julie Castro’s (2008) study “Becoming a Teacher Educator” in order to understand this change and to see the effect it would have on me and my students. Along with Castro, I felt it was important to begin with reflective writings of my history and artwork, including my early life influences, personality development, and teaching journey.

The Teaching Artist Handbook explains that “art-making [is] a curriculum lab” with the purpose “[of analyzing] one’s own arts practice from the point of view of learning and teaching. The goal is to make concrete connections between one’s own expertise and interests as an artist and person, and ideas about what and how to teach in one’s medium” (Jaffe et al., 2013, p. 119). Continuing to analyze myself like *The Teaching Artist Handbook* suggests, I wrote about how I work as an artist and how I create, about the different themes that are present in my art, and

about my connections to other artists. Each of these aspects of my life have led me to become the artist and teacher I am today.

An Overview of Action Research

What importance is a self-study if you don't use what you learn and act on it?

Bob Dick describes action research this way:

Action: To bring about change in some community or organization or program.

Research: To increase understanding on the part of the researcher or the client, or both (and often some wider community). (1993, p. 6)

Generally, the goal of action research in education is to effect change or understanding within the classroom, the client or student, and the wider teacher population, creating positive educational change (Mills, 2000). Action research is more concerned with qualitative inquiry data than the quantity of data (Mills, 2000). To obtain this qualitative data, the action research cycle generally consists of four main repeating steps: reflect, plan, act, and observe (Kemmis, McTaggart, & Nixon, 2014). The researcher must first reflect on the problem that needs to be addressed, then make a plan to fix the problem, and then put the plan into action. The final step is to observe the effects or collect data. This cycle is shown in Figure 16 below.

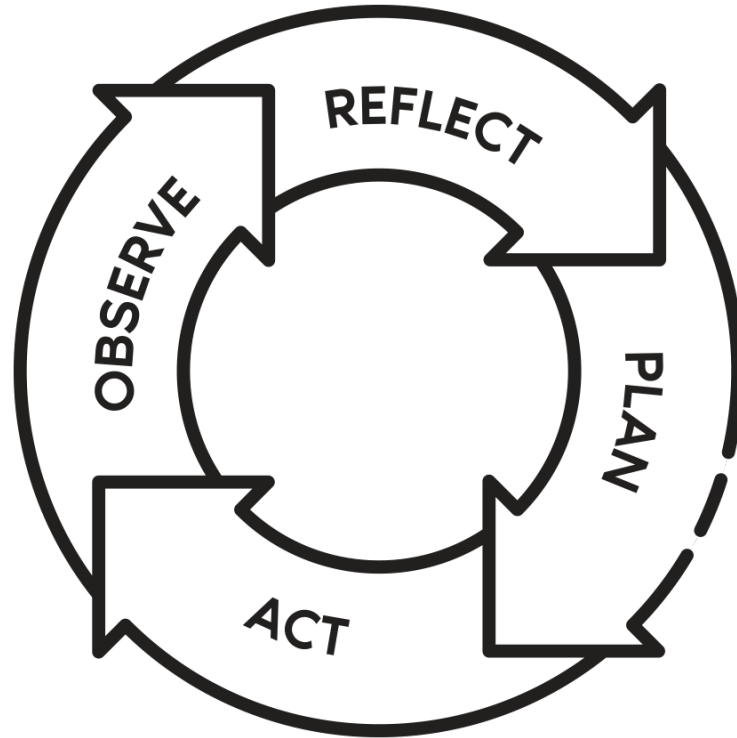


Figure 16. The Action Research Cycle

For action research to be credible, transferable, dependable, and confirmable (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), these steps must be repeated multiple times to create a continuous cycle. One-time planning, observing, and reflecting is not enough to create effective action research. As stated by Anderson, Herr, and Nihlen, “These cycles form a spiral that results in refinements of research questions, resolution of problems, and transformations in the perspectives of researchers and participants” (1994, p. 3; see Figure 17).

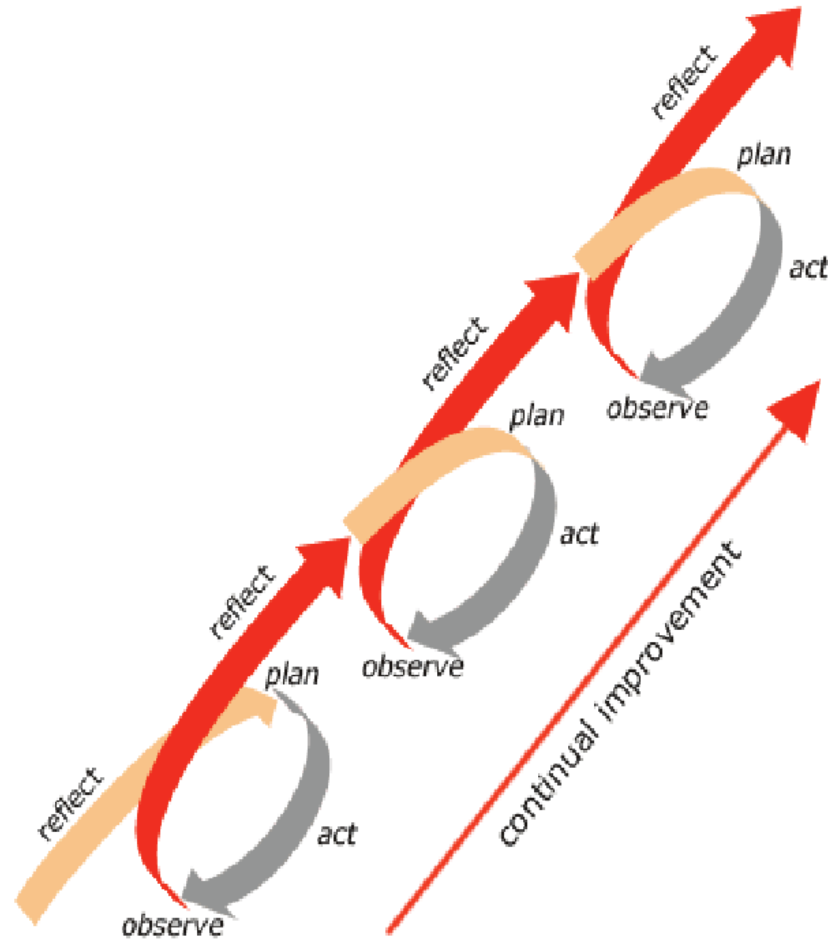


Figure 17. The Continuous Action Research Cycle

For my research, I used action research as a strategy to experiment with different approaches to curriculum and teaching. I repeated the process of doing a project, observing what happened, reflecting on what happened, then adjusting my approach for the next project. The current study describes how I made small adjustments to my curriculum and teaching over one semester.

My Curriculum

There is no one way of teaching, and teachers are constantly working around school-imposed parameters to discover new methods of presenting material in the classroom. This can create a wide variety of presentations on a subject. Therefore, embracing my written reflections

about how I, as an artist, create while working under preprescribed constraints and using *The Teaching Artist Handbook* as a guide, I created a curriculum that I put into practice in my Foundation II art class. *The Teaching Artist Handbook* states, “Curriculum . . . allows the teaching artist, learners and others to reflect in ways that are essential to improving practice; for some artists curriculum can also be a way to better understand what they do in their art form” (Jaffe et al., 2013, p. 9). I think it is important for the curriculum to meet the needs of both the students and the teacher to create an enjoyable experience for everyone in the classroom.

My original curriculum formulated the initial structure for the class, including time spent in class and the projects that would be completed. Feedback from my students and discussions about what they would like to achieve in class allowed for a continual shifting and reformulating of the curriculum. Polkinghorne (2005) explains that a valuable source of documentary evidence can consist of written and/or visual artifacts. With this mind, I asked students to answer questions similar to my personal daily questions on Google forms at the beginning and ending of class, which they would be graded on. Students used cell phones or laptops to complete the forms. On the Google form, they recorded their personal daily goals and wrote about how they felt about a particular project, how I as a teacher had helped them, and how they wished I could have helped them. Other questions were included as the semester progressed. In their responses, students also wrote reviews of their artwork and their artistic process and provided a photograph of their work.

The Relationship between Self-Study and Action Research

According to Kurt Lewin, “In social management, as in medicine, the practitioner will usually have the choice between various methods of treatment and he will require as much skill and ingenuity as the physician in regard to both diagnosis and treatment” (1946, p. 44). As a

researcher, using multiple interconnecting methodologies is as normal and as fundamentally crucial as a physician deciding what various methods are important for his or her patient.

My self-study was designed to increase self-reflection on my current actions, thoughts, and feelings. In turn, these discoveries would influence my curriculum and teaching and further my development in self-reflection. The relationships between self-study and action research are illustrated in Figure 18.

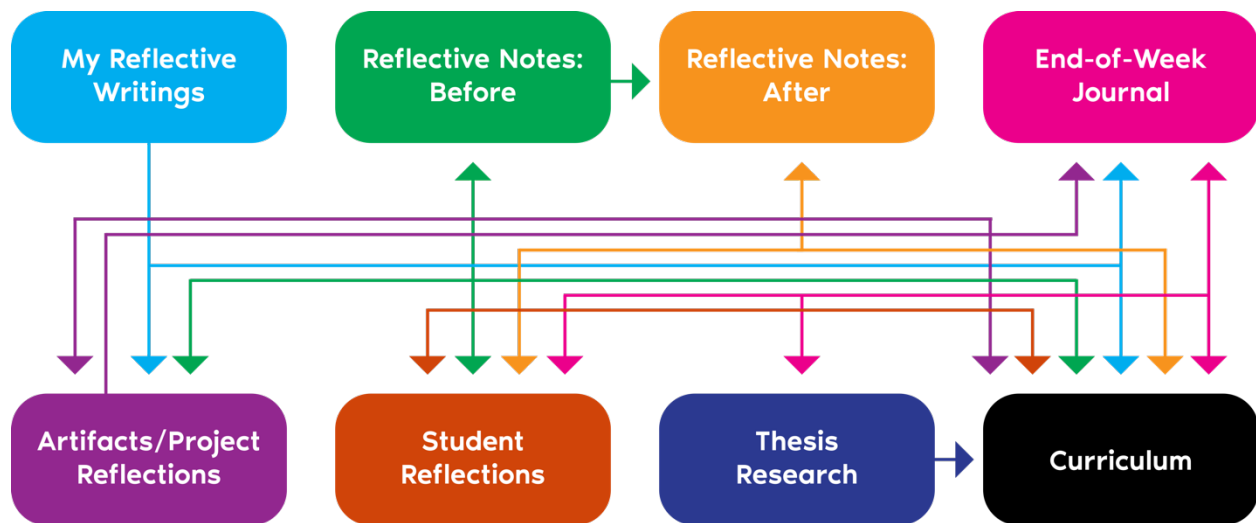


Figure 18. The Relationships between Self-Study and Action Research

This diagram shows how messy and complex research is. As shown, each part of the research project is important and influential on other areas of the research. Since action research naturally includes the reflection part of the process, the self-study portions flow right into the action research. Through these strategies, I hoped to gain a deeper-rooted understanding of my own practices and obtain a lifelong inner-examination habit that could further my own art practice.

Data Evaluation

The data I collected in this study is qualitative, consisting largely of my own observations and reflections. Many of the initial actions I took in my classroom originated from my written

self-reflections, which I titled “The History of the Heart” and “My Art Contextualized with Current Art Practices.” I utilized these writings throughout the semester as part of my curriculum and teaching and adjusted my approach as problems arose. Through evaluating my reflections, I discovered themes related to approaching assignments, encouraging openness, coping with loss, enriching horizons, and developing realizations.

I also used student responses to evaluate how effective my teaching was. I analyzed the changes between each question over time and compared the answers students provided before class with the answers they provided after class. For example, I looked to see if a student who felt stressed about a project at the beginning of class felt confident about the project at the end of class. I also analyzed my own answers to the before-and-after-class surveys and cross-referenced them with the students’ answers to highlight any anomalies. For example, my students might have reflected positively about an event that occurred in the classroom that I had reflected negatively about. With this process, several themes emerged, including the existence of polarized responses and perceived realities, previously unknown realizations, roadblocks that needed to be addressed, and the need for flexibility.

Critical Review of Self-Study

Bullough and Pinnegar, who reflect Mooney’s (1957) critique of self-study, say that “each self-study researcher must negotiate that balance [gathering quality self-reflection data versus outside-influences data], but it must be a balance—tipping too far toward the self-side produces solipsism or a confessional, and tipping too far the other way turns self-study into traditional research” (2001, p. 15). With this in mind, I planned to include “nodal moments” in my written history and Chapter 4 and 5 reflections. A nodal moment, according to Robert Graham, is “a point of crisis at which time . . . lives [undergo] a wrenching.” He continues, “The

course of life is seen to have connecting lines that were previously hidden, a new direction becomes clear where only wandering existed before” (1989, p. 98). He expresses the importance of the researcher’s retrospective view in determining the pattern of the experience. Through critical reflection in my journal, not over-exaggerating or undermining experiences, and through analysis of my students’ responses, I expected that experimental truths would emerge.

Bullough and Pinnegar also criticize self-study “questions [that] lack significance and fail to engage reviewer imagination, [where] the questions answered are not found compelling, are purely personal, or are not answered in compelling ways” (2001, p. 15). Although I was interested in how shifting my pedagogy might change my dispositions toward teaching, the central feature of my approach was the act of reflection in itself and how this might change my teaching practice and experience. According to Bullough and Pinnegar, “What counts as data expands greatly, and researchers face the difficulty of representing, presenting, legitimating, analyzing, and reporting one’s own experience as data” (2001, p. 15). This was a legitimate problem I needed to find a solution for.

Critical Review of Action Research

According to Burgess and Newton, “[There] is a concern with the capacity of teacher researchers to ensure that selected modes of inquiry are appropriate to the research problem, that research approaches can reasonably be assumed to produce desired research outcomes, and that teacher researchers can assess whether they have, in fact, achieved the desired outcomes for the research process” (2008, p. 24). In order to avoid evaluating desired research outcomes, my questions did not assess whether my plans to change succeeded in making the classroom experience better but rather how they changed the classroom experience, primarily for me.

Burgess and Newton also say, “The implications for action research as an institutionally directed (rather than emergent) mode of inquiry seem obvious. The purposes of action research are clearly moving away from locally determined improvement initiatives. In this case, action research is focused on the improvement of practice as its primary purpose” (2008, p. 20).

In *Becoming Critical*, authors Carr and Kemmis remark that action research “includes the inability of the interpretive approach to produce wide-ranging generalization, or to provide ‘objective’ standards for verifying or refuting theoretical accounts” (1986, p. 94). If this research was to be generalizable, it would need to be conducted on a larger scale, which could create the potential for the research to become an artificial, top-down teacher improvement. This would make this type of research seem inconsequential in the greater scheme of improving a teacher’s practice.

CHAPTER 4

Results

This thesis is largely about my response to the challenges I faced as an art teacher. I used an autobiographical exploration of my own lived experiences as a teacher and artist, artist research, student feedback, student projects, and intense self-reflection to approach these challenges. My original research questions were (a) How does the process of reflecting on my teaching change my overall satisfaction, perspective, attitude toward teaching, sense of personal growth, and disposition toward school? (b) What actions did I take that influenced these reflections? and (c) How does connecting my artistic self to my teaching practices influence my sense of success or personal satisfaction? The following results are based on the self-reflection data I gathered on a daily and weekly basis.

Starting Point: Teaching as Art

My original response to my feelings of being disconnected from my artistic self was to turn my teaching practice into some kind of art practice. I was also interested in how my artistic experiences might influence my teaching and perhaps influence my sense of fulfillment as a teacher. I hoped that my inner reflections about what I do as an artist could have a positive influence on my teaching. These reflections were designed to mold my teaching and art practice into one. I didn't know what a teaching-practice-turned-into-artistry looked like; therefore, my exploration to define this didn't quite end up the way I expected. I studied Tino Sehgal and Jorge Lucero but it was still difficult for me to intertwine my art practice with my teaching practice.

I thought that perhaps I could think of my classroom as a similar kind of artwork as Jorge Lucero's open office. My art room is always open, and I encourage students to come before and after school (not many take me up on the offer). While this is not quite the same as teaching-as-

artwork, I did see the connections between art-making and teaching in conversations and interactions with students during class or during school remediation time. The personal interactions I have with my students have encouraged them either to become intrinsically motivated or eager to please the teacher. These interactions influence the quality of art they create, their productivity, and their willingness to spend the time and effort needed to create good art.

In an end-of-the-week response four months into the semester, I wrote, “As an artist I feel like I don’t have time to create. I am still trying to change my mindset that my teaching is my artwork and not feel guilty that I am not able to create as much. It is a very hard transition to obtain.” As an artist, I think I need to create artwork that is separate from my teaching. This difficulty in connecting teaching to my art practice ultimately resulted in a change in my research focus.

Although I wasn’t sure how to turn my profession into my art, I decided that changing the art projects I gave to students, and changing how I presented those projects, might help create a classroom where I felt less stress and where students were more involved in their own personal art-making. Typically, I am very specific about materials and process, but I wanted to be more open so that students could pursue their individual interests. For the first project, a paper-puppet technique, I gave students the prompt to create three pieces of artwork using the technique literally or as a segue to another project, such as tracing the puppet multiple times. This would allow us to explore together and see what we could come up with.

This approach was consistent with ideas from *The Teaching Artist Handbook*: “Clarity about which specific techniques and concepts you want to transmit to students actually allows you greater flexibility and scope with which to create time and space for real invention and

experimentation and expression by students,” (Jaffe et al., 2013, p. 10). Also, “Learning how to do just about anything involves some combination of structured or rote practice, and free, dynamic application” (2013, p. 108). This approach reminded me that sometimes in my art-making practice, I just enjoy playing with a process or technique and want to explore it without worrying about what the end product might be. Changes like this to my teaching style and curriculum were less a reflection of teaching as an art practice and more a reflection of the process of finding joy and fulfillment in teaching in a way that was similar to how I approached the process of making an art piece.

My Art Journey Connected to Teaching

A key element of my study was using an autobiographical/autoethnographic study both as a research methodology and as a strategy to counter the difficult personal challenges I was facing as a teacher. Part of this study was a reflection on my own art-making practices, which I included at the beginning of the thesis. I also reflected on what it means to be an artist and what I wished I would have known when I was an art student. I attempted to integrate these reflections into my teaching and curriculum.

After writing my artist reflection, I realized that I wished someone had encouraged me to write about my work earlier. Through my graduate classes, I learned that I was not alone in not feeling part of the contemporary art world. I thought the contemporary world was too odd and that I didn’t fit in. Some of my colleagues also felt a little out of place because they wanted to create in a more traditional way. However, through my classes, written reflections, and discussions with Dr. Barney, I learned that contemporary conceptual art is part of the same art world as contemporary traditional art and that I could still fit in that space. I realized that my idea of what contemporary art is wasn’t a full picture. Concepts are only part of a whole. Painting,

drawing, sculpting, realism, installations, abstract, participatory, land, collection, performance, and conceptual art are all part of the same art world. This insight led me to introduce my students to many different ways to create.

During the semester my students took pictures of their projects and created digital portfolios to help promote their artwork using Adobe Sparks to gain an artist skill application. We learned about how much work goes into putting an art show together as an artist skill application as well. They created their own fictional art show using the guidelines of 5 most typical art show roles activity James Rees presented at UAEA in 2016. Regarding this exercise, one student commented, “It was good because we got to use our imagination a lot.” Each student in the school is also required to submit one piece of artwork for the end-of-the-year art show in the library. My Art Foundation II students made posters using Adobe Sparks to promote the art show and helped with set-up and take-down. These activities broadened students’ understanding of what goes into being an artist, such as documenting and advertising their skill sets.

I found several specific themes when connecting my art practices to my teaching, including materials, artists, and time constraints. Each of these aspects of my artistic practice influenced the direction I took the Art Foundation II class.

Materials. Through my own reflections about my artistic practices, I realized that sometimes I am inspired by materials. From the time I was a child, I have been resourceful about using a variety of different materials to create. During my student teaching, I found different ways to complete a project due to lack of money or materials. I like to use recycled materials or repurpose materials for different intents. These projects are often the most interesting.

For a class project for my students, I collected a variety of materials and asked them to create an unconventional-materials artwork using these items. Students could choose materials from what I

provided or bring materials they thought were visually interesting and then arrange them in a personally aesthetic way. Some of my students particularly enjoyed this project—six out of 33 students picked this project as their favorite. It was interesting to see the polarized opinions about class projects. Students who chose other assignments as their favorite hated the unconventional-materials project. One student mentioned that her least favorite project “probably was the unconventional materials project. I’m not a crafty type of person, and it just took so much time.” I was learning that in spite of a teacher’s best plans, some students are going to be more engaged with some projects than others. There’s no need to stress over students who don’t care about a particular project—they might be the ones who really like the next one.

Other artists. In my artwork reflection, I also realized that I am sometimes inspired by other artists. Because of this, I had my students research different artists and find an artwork, material, or process they were inspired by. I also introduced them to several different visiting artists who talked about their process of finding themselves in the art world. One artist colleague of mine, Emmalee Powell, created a year’s worth of paintings of the same subject matter, using just oil paint. She also painted without proper tools and used just her left hand. Her work demonstrated how repetition and constraints can foster creativity. I have used repetition and restraints in my own artwork, and it has improved my quality of work and pushed me beyond what I thought I could make. For example, my constraint of using clear acrylic and found materials limited my artwork but ultimately helped me come up with new meanings and purposes for the same materials or ideas.

In teaching, repetition and constraints are always unavoidable. The same curriculum outlines are often repeated because it is easier than having to reinvent the wheel every year, but the teacher must figure out what doesn’t work and what needs adjustments. I learned that having

an early-morning class full of adolescents meant that students would be tired and possibly not mentally ready for their day of school. To overcome this constraint, I had to find other ways to reach out to my students, such as one-on-one conversations instead of group discussions.

Another constraint, limited class time, means the teacher must find new ways to use time effectively when implementing lesson plans. The physical constraint of money also forces the teacher to be creative about what types of projects will work in the classroom. My personal mental constraint of having high expectations for my students can be beneficial—teachers should have goals for their students—but it can also be damaging when I feel let down when my expectations aren't met. In addition, my emotional constraints limit what I can take on as a teacher but also liberate me in that I know what my limit is and can avoid related problems.

Another artist colleague shared with students how he used his artistic abilities to pursue graphic design and business. These real-life examples exposed students to working artists and the paths they took to create. My students were very impressed with his presentation. One student in the class wrote, "I think he taught us very important parts of design and also how to take negative and positive criticism. I think those are the most important things of being an artist (or any other career)." Another student said, "I liked how he said design is important for any career." Students used these presentations to help inspire their projects.

Time constraints. Lack of class time is a constant problem for me. I had forgotten the time it takes to come up with an idea and create a good project. While researching my own artwork, I ultimately realized that it was difficult for me to create on a whim and that it takes time for me to build ideas. I discovered that I also have to be in the mood to create to be successful. However, when I randomly do get an idea, I can't get it out of my head until I have executed it. Many students expressed frustration in their survey responses of being stuck or

feeling stressed about having good ideas and turning assignments in on time. For example, one student responded, “Worried about time management for all my assignments due today that I haven’t finished.” I need to remember to put myself in my students’ shoes and keep in mind that they may need more time for a project, even when I think they should be done and moving on to another project.

For a few projects later in the semester, I created more structure for my students by requiring sketches to be checked off by me before they worked on their projects. I chose not to penalize them for not coming up with ideas right away but rather rewarded them with points when they did finally come up with an idea. This enabled some students to fully think through their idea before they discussed how or if their idea would work with me. This process helped some students better understand my expectations for them, which helped them better meet those expectations. In my reflection, I wrote that “I would like to do the progress photos at the end of every class period. We still don’t know how to do this though.” This would allow students to see their progress over time and better understand how they are using or managing their time.

In my own art practice, sketching my ideas doesn’t work well for me. I’m more successful with trial-and-error. Most of the time, however, I do not give my students the same opportunity. I often feel that once they have chosen an idea, they should move ahead with it. As this is not what naturally happens for me, I shouldn’t expect that it would for my students. I understand this realization now, but I am still working on how to change my classroom structure to allow these natural developments to occur. I am trying to find a way to accommodate the natural processes of art-making under the artificial constraints of the school system and my curriculum.

Reflections on Student Responses

Reading students' feedback gave me insight into their thinking. It was helpful for me to see what parts of the projects were challenging for them. This process strengthened my relationships with my students because I could better understand their concerns. It was also interesting to see that sometimes my thinking was different from their thinking. For example, in response to the prompt to write about what project students liked best, one student responded, "I didn't like any of the projects. I thought they were too 3D. I took this class so I wouldn't have to do 3D projects." This was interesting to me because while the projects had slight three-dimensional aspects to them, they were open enough that students could focus more on the two-dimensional side. For example, in a book-fold art project, students were taught how to create different book folds (three-dimensional), which could then contain two-dimensional artwork on the inside and fold flat or be permanently folded open to create a three-dimensional project. This student had a completely different interpretation of the intent of the project. I have realized that it is probably not a good idea to create expectations for students without knowing what they are capable of and how they are actually thinking about a project. Discovering this information, whether in discussions or in other ways, enables the teacher to help students better understand expectations and allows the teacher to make adjustments as needed. This process can help students feel comfortable venturing out of their comfort zones and trying something new.

At first, my students' responses were anonymous, which I enjoyed but the students did not. They begged me to include their responses in their grades for the class, which I did. I didn't like grading their responses because it meant that names had to be associated with them. I think this made it harder for some of the students to say what they really thought. Anonymous or not, common responses were "meh," "good," "ok," and "idk," so it was hard for me to get detailed

information about what they really thought about the projects. In an after-class response regarding a classroom discussion, I wrote, “I am a little frustrated because they [the students] are not willing to answer the questions I am asking the class. They will answer if I directly say they need to, but no one volunteers. It’s weird.” This can be one of the most frustrating aspects of teaching—wanting to engage students in a discussion, and they’re just not interested. Creating another way for students to provide information, such as these response questions, can help uncover some important classroom issues that can be addressed with the whole class if necessary.

With my students, class discussions were often so quiet you could hear crickets chirping. They didn’t get much better over the semester. After reading a few of the before-class responses, I realized that the students were tired or stressed about the school day, which is probably why they didn’t have the energy to answer questions. As a result, I leaned heavily on their before-and-after class responses for feedback when notable interactions weren’t evident during class time. Having the names associated with responses did help me see differences between what students were saying in their responses and what they were actually doing in class. In one after-class response, a student expressed frustration that he didn’t get the full participation points because he was fooling around in class. Knowing the name associated with this response allowed me to put the feedback in proper context. In the past, these types of responses would have hurt me, but understanding the situation made the process easier for me. It also allowed me to address some important issues that students wouldn’t normally say directly to me. One student, for example, commented, “I feel like I got a little bit of stuff done, but I’m still stressed.” Knowing how this student felt aided in my interactions with her and gave me an opportunity to offer reassurance.

Adjustments and Redirection

Regarding projects and my interactions with students, one important change was shifting my expectations for projects and changing my grading process throughout the semester. At the beginning of the semester, my instructions about the class were very vague and open. Some students thrived with these open instructions, and some did not take advantage of the openness like I had expected. This is an important issue in teaching. My expectations for students' completed projects and for how they are engaged with their art-making is behind much of my frustration or satisfaction with teaching. For me, there is a tension between open instructions and very specific instructions. Projects with very specific instructions seem more like technique exercises than art. I try to give a technique exercise before each project so students can gain skills before working on the actual project. However, for this Art Foundation II class, I thought the students had all of the necessary skills to be successful with the assignments, so I didn't do many technique-based exercises. I thought I could be my "ideal teacher" by giving a prompt such as, "Create a piece of artwork that explores the concept of identity as an evolving, shifting, thing." I realize that I need to let that expectation go because of the negative emotions I feel if the students don't meet my imaginary expectations.

Based on the students' feedback, I also utilized their ideas about how and what should be graded. They liked the idea of peer grading or reviewing, so we tried that. When asked to provide feedback about peer grading, one student said, "I think it makes you think about why you got a certain grade, but I don't know if some kids will decide to give people full points anyway just because of friends, but who knows." In my own after-class response after reading student responses, I wrote, "I think they don't believe the teacher knows what the students are going through, and so they don't like the teacher grading because of that." I think the students assumed

that teachers don't know how hard projects are, which isn't necessarily true, but it was an interesting idea to think about. I was surprised by some students' peer-grading abilities and how honest they were. Other students were less honest, just as some students predicted.

Grading is difficult for many teachers. In an end-of-the-week response I said, "I really dislike grades. I wish I could do without grades. It stresses me out, and all the students want are A's without having to earn them. I try to do a bunch of easy ways for them to earn the grade, but apparently it isn't enough for many of them. I am not enjoying grades. I don't know what to do instead though. I have changed grading a few times; maybe I need to think of another solution for grading this class." In another end-of-the-week response, I said "Grading on effort is something I think any teacher would love to do. However, it isn't enough because it is difficult to 'measure.' We need to figure out how to help the student succeed, not reward them just if they put in the effort." On another day I said, "I just want my students to succeed and create things they are proud of and enjoy this process of working like an artist." It would be easier just to give all of my students A's, but I don't because I want my students to work hard to improve and earn the grade based on their individual growth and ability.

Because of the peer-grading fiasco and students' lack of effort and imagination in completing the projects, I realized that they needed more structure than I wanted to give them. Having constructive criticism or feedback can help students progress and also be prepared for the real world. Consequently, I created more structure for each project, even though I would have liked the students to have less structure as the semester progressed. Earlier in the semester, I had been overwhelmed by the amount of structure I had to give students. The open-ended projects definitely were a lot more rewarding for me when students were exceeding my expectations. For example, in one of my journal reflections I was impressed by "a student who took the

technique to a 3D level. I didn't even think of that myself. I also enjoyed when a student was *finally* able to make the joint work. He was so proud. Then he found that the joint looked like arrows and started drawing arrows. That was really cool." I wondered if perhaps I had assigned the projects in the wrong order. Did I need to create more structured projects for the beginning of the semester, then gradually loosen up instead of jumping right into a light structure?

I felt like I was never able to give a simple prompt and then have the kids run with it. This was Art Foundation II, where I expected students to be more motivated. These students were in the top art class, and most were brilliant artists, but they were the hardest to motivate. They did not manage their time wisely, and it was difficult to push them to try new things. They were my hardest class. I reflected, "It is difficult when you see a student with a lot of potential, and they don't live up to it. It is really sad because you know they are gifted, but they are lazy. I heard that my most talented class will be the most difficult. Now I see that."

I tried to encourage my students, but there was only so much I could do. They had never had me as a teacher before and didn't know how I work as a teacher and what I expected from them as students. I had assumed the students would be more responsible because they were older. To motivate them, I tried bringing art supplies to class to see if I could create alongside them, but the students needed more guidance than I had expected, which made it difficult for me to create anything. I wrote, "I want them to see what I work on and how I do things," thinking this would help motivate them and also help me connect my art practice with my teaching. In an end-of-the-week response just before school ended for the year, I answered the question, "What have I learned about myself as an artist?" In the response, I explained, "I learned that if I don't have a set amount of time with no distractions and nothing else I have to do, I can create, but when I have students or grades or lesson planning, I can't make myself create. It's sad. I

wanted to make stuff in my classes, but I couldn't mentally do it." Making my teaching into my art practice was difficult. Though I had heard of other teachers' success with this practice, I realized that it would not work for me.

I also experimented with different approaches to get students started on each project. I asked them to research artists they might be inspired by and then create sketches (which many didn't complete because they thought they were too hard) and have peer conversations about their ideas. I tried really hard to present new mediums and prompts to spark ideas. Some students thrived, and some thought the prompts were dumb. Most projects were open enough that students could choose to create something three-dimensional or two-dimensional or a combination of both. Some used this opportunity well, and some were stuck. Regarding these open-ending projects, I reflected, saying, "The most rewarding was today. All of my students worked and got things done. Which was a *miracle!* I am seeing some pretty cool things. Some are more 2D and some more 3D. They are taking it where they feel comfortable. It's really neat." Another insight into these projects was, "This project right now (3D book) is most rewarding to see what they are able to come up with. Each student is able to take the project and push it forward with their interests (such as drawing or painting) or with their strengths, and that's been really fun seeing what they enjoy." The students inspired me by coming up with ideas I had never thought of before.

I have since changed my project order, beginning the semester with stricter outlines for projects, then helping students build skills, and then loosening up. This arrangement creates a build-up of challenges and helps me avoid the assumption that students are at the level I want them to be. So far it has been more successful.

Limitations of Open Projects

I started with the idea of creating open-ended projects so that my students could use these ideas and soar with them. These projects made it possible for students to pursue themes, materials, or techniques they wanted to use. Unfortunately, this did not go to plan. I felt defeated and sometimes thought of teaching as a battle, which I was losing. I realized, however, that my reflections can allow me as a teacher to step back and consider affordances and limitations of any particular strategy rather than judge my own teaching.

Throughout the semester, keeping kids on task was difficult, which I thought I could change. I imagined myself as a teacher who could give students an open-ended project and let them run with it. At first, my students were excited about these open-ended projects, including one who said, “It allowed for wiggle room, so we could do the project that we envisioned in our minds.” But they would soon lost interest and wouldn’t stay on task.

I tried several different ways to keep them working, which was difficult. In an after-class response a month or so into the semester, I wrote, “I also need to figure out a way to help the students to be more on task. I’m not sure what to do other than to keep reminding them and reminding them.” I had to think of a variety of ways to approach the students differently, which was mentally exhausting. If things were going badly, I tried redirecting them and asking how their project was going or what they were doing. Sometimes I would just chat with them about life to try to make them feel comfortable and then tie the conversation back to the project. Sometimes I would just walk by and remind them to be on task. Other times I would offer a few ideas and try to push them in a direction they liked. It was almost impossible to get some students do much of anything. Being social was more important to them than trying. Some projects showed real insight, and some were very basic. Some came out really clean and others

messy. One student commented about another classmate's work, "Not enough effort put into it by other people." I became disappointed and focused on the product. This brought me down, and I dreaded coming into work.

My sense of fulfillment seemed to be based on something that was out of my control: how much students are engaged with the projects I give them and how hard they are working. I needed to adjust how I feel joy at school. I can feel like a failure as a teacher if my students are not producing interesting works of art because for me, that is what provides evidence that art class was a success. Ultimately, I have learned that my imagined teacher needs to retire so that I can construct my own best way to teach. I need to avoid having so many preconceived ideas about how things should go and instead see what happens in the classroom and adjust when necessary.

Affordances of Open Projects

An important change I made was experimenting with the expectations I created for the art assignments, particularly if the projects were more open. I discovered that there are affordances and limitations to giving the students more freedom or openness. My own reflections about the results of this experiment included, "Some students need more direction than others, but that's okay. . . . I wish there was a magical way to get students even more motivated. I want them to use their minds more to expand on what they can do in class and not take it as face value." On another occasion I reflected, "I like how open the project is to materials and ideas. There is a lot more variety than in a lot of projects I am able to do [with my students]. There are several who are stuck in the traditional way of [making] the project, but many are working and coming up with further ideas than what I would have thought of." In addition to designing project expectations for my students, I was also working through my own expectations for what

should happen in an art class. For example, I thought that the ideal classroom would be one where I give a prompt and the students get right to work and are fully engaged with the project. When this did not happen, I felt disappointed and frustrated “because half the students like the projects and are working and half are not interested.”

However, some of the students did very well with more open expectations. One student practiced a lot on her own and commented to me that she liked that the projects were so open because she could venture into what she was interested in. She created some of the best responses to the projects. I talked with her several times toward the end of the semester and asked her why she enjoyed or didn't enjoy certain projects and what she would keep and change. Through her insight and my own experience, I was able to reflect on what I could do to help the students enjoy their work and be more successful. This student, currently a tenth-grader, has emailed me and visited me several times at the junior high. I have realized that this is why I enjoy teaching. Not every student will come back and show appreciation for me and the projects they created, but it sure does feel good when it happens. Perhaps I had influenced others more than I thought.

I can see how closely my own expectations for teaching are connected to my feelings of satisfaction or frustration. After trying this particular approach, I saw that it works for some students, while other students need a more directed approach. Or perhaps I just needed to develop a culture in my classroom where students learn to adjust to my expectations. Or perhaps I need to become more skilled at creating a space where we can negotiate what works best. Or perhaps I need to adjust some of my own expectations for how things should go.

CHAPTER 5

Discussion

My original response to the challenges I was facing as an art teacher was to change my attitude about being a teacher, to become more reflective about my teaching practice and curriculum, and to try to connect my artistic self to my teaching self. Through these reflections and experiences in this study, I have discovered aspects of myself as an artist and a teacher that have helped me mold my own and my students' learning and creating experience. I discovered how to allow myself to change and transform. I discovered questions that need to be explored further. I also created projections for the future.

Connection between My Art Practice and Teaching

I was not able to change my teaching into my art like I had envisioned. Nevertheless, I was able to learn a few things that worked and didn't work for this journey. My attempt to apply some of my own artistic practices, such as in the use of materials, artists, and time constraints, to student projects was successful for me. When reflecting on what I did well one week as an artist/teacher, I wrote, "As an artist, I am good at coming up with solutions. . . . I was able to think on my toes and really think of ways that help my students. I am really proud of myself for being able to do that. I let my students play around with a technique and watch me fail as I showed them. I think it showed them that I am not perfect, even as a teacher/artist."

Throughout this study I was trying to recover myself as a teacher and make a connection between my artistic practice and my work as a teacher. Reflecting on my history as an artist brought many things to light that I was able to apply to my own teaching, such as the use of found materials and finding inspiration in the work of artists. I learned that Jorge Lucero's practices didn't fit my style and that I needed to find different ways to connect my artistic life to

my teaching. Finding other ways to connect to my artistic life helped me gain important insights about being an artist and a teacher.

Awareness of Attitude

I wanted to become less reactive and more reflective about the challenges and rewards of being an artist teacher. The lack of joy I was experiencing in teaching was a difficult challenge. During an in-class screen-printing project, Dr. Mark Graham from BYU visited my classroom and observed the students. Their resulting artwork was disappointing for me. Dr. Graham pointed out the mistakes in one of the student's work and showed me how the mistakes made the artwork interesting. He actually liked the pieces with mistakes more than the perfect ones (Figure 19). He also pointed out how engaged the students were and how confident I appeared to be. I really internalized his comment. I was letting the products my students produced determine if I was a good teacher or if I was enjoying my career. This was an important insight for me. My own expectations for my students were defeating me.



Figure 19. Student Screen Print

Many of my personal written responses were similar to this: “I am frustrated by the fact that certain students don’t work no matter what I do. Good or bad. I need to not be bothered by it.” Of course, this was easier said than done. It took me a while to accept that some students were messier, and their messiness might be a positive aspect of their work. This was a turning point in my perception of their art and the effect it had on my well-being. A positive interaction I noticed was, “It is nice to see another student helping another succeed, even if they are not working on their own project.” Perhaps it was the process or journey I should have been paying attention to, not the product. *The Teaching Artist Handbook* explains, “The point is not always to have students create finished, polished work, but to provide tools and the time for students to

develop their work, however preliminary or fragmentary, in interesting and original directions” (Jaffe et al., 2013, p. 115). This is still difficult for me, but I am now aware enough to adjust my attitude. One of the important insights I gained during my study was how difficult it can be for me to find joy in the process of teaching, especially when students are not meeting my expectations or when their work or behavior diverges from my expectation.

One of the most difficult challenges for a teacher is students who are apathetic or do not work. Through this process, I realized that I also based my joy on whether the students were working or not. I came up with many different tactics and got really creative to try to get my students to work. This taught me more about my students than I could have imagined. I think the students began to respect me more because I took the time to get to know them instead of harping on them all the time. It was really stressful to focus on how slow they were working, or if they were working at all. One day I reflected that my goal was to “help [student name here] focus with a positive attitude.”

Getting to know the students on a personal level instead of just on a teacher-to-student level made my time teaching more bearable. After a month, one of my goal responses was “to encourage my students to finish their projects and to turn them in. I hope to see finished products! I am also interested in having conversations with my students as well.” This response is interesting because in most of my previous responses, I wanted to have finished products, not relationships. I realized that I really did enjoy talking to my students. I just needed to remember to relax and let go of some of my more rigid expectations. This is a subtle skill, since I think it is important to have high expectations for students. Maybe this is what Jorge Lucero’s work is about—the relationships and experiences with others as the art.

One insight from my semester of reflections was that an important part of the experience of teaching is the social interaction, not only the number of completed projects. This idea was difficult for me to accept because I felt like a failure compared to other teachers whose students' district art show pieces were truly amazing. This was a recurring theme in my study: the contrast between what I thought the ideal teacher was doing and what I was doing as teacher. I often felt that my own work did not compare well with my expectations. Comparing my students' work to other teachers' student felt defeating. I felt like my students should be doing that same quality of work. This decreased my morale and contributed to my sense of failure. But, an important insight I gained from my reflections was that I didn't know what had happened behind the scenes with these students. As Dr. Graham pointed out in his visit, students who I thought were doing badly were expressing themselves in new ways that perhaps I didn't completely appreciate. And maybe those students who were doing the work that looked so great had other contributing experiences. Perhaps they were extra-naturally talented or older, or maybe they worked on the pieces longer or had their teachers' help.

Change and Transformation

While teaching over the last few years, I have learned to become more patient. I am not the most patient person, and I still have a long way to go, but I have definitely progressed. My first year teaching at a junior high and working with the anger-management unit really tried my patience. The circumstances were difficult, but I realized that getting to know my students and letting them have a place in my classroom was more important than what they were making. Being patient has made me calmer and in some ways happier because I don't get upset about as many things as I normally would in class. This is a challenge for a beginning teacher like me

because I have so many ideas about teacher success and student accomplishment. I often fall short of these ideals and become discouraged or feel defeated.

As a reflective teacher, I realized that I cannot control everything that goes on in the classroom. I can't create assignments, rules, and classroom design once and expect that they will work for every group of students I have. Things are constantly changing, including my students, administrators, teaching standards, and me. This may seem like a silly realization—because things always change—but I realized that I wasn't ready to change my ideal picture of a classroom. I needed to let go. I am still learning to let go. In teaching this class to a new group of students, I have reverted to some of my old ways, but in other ways I believe I have changed for the better. Bad habits such as needing to control or being really hard on myself are difficult to break and may be a continual battle for me. However, I am becoming more aware and reflective about my teaching practice.

I do not like to give up, even when things may be painfully hard. I might drag my heels and procrastinate, but I have an intense internal push to follow through. A few teaching circumstances improved because I was willing to stick up for myself and ask for permanent technology and instructional technology help for my classroom. In the future, teaching circumstances will improve or decline, fluctuating over time, but I know I need to be ready for change and be willing to go with the flow. I like thinking of new ideas and solutions for problems, but it can be difficult to do when the other side of your personality is pulling you in another direction. I know that my teaching journey will be easier and happier if I don't put unnecessary pressure on myself based on what is successful in the classroom or not.

Sometimes, when you begin a journey, you think it will lead you one way, but you realize that you need to let it take you somewhere else. One important part of self-study is allowing

yourself to be flexible enough to let the research lead you. What I thought I was doing was turning my teaching into my art practice; what I ended up doing was becoming a more reflective teacher. Becoming a more reflective teacher means many things to me. One of the insights I gained from this study was that the research/reflective process gave me a way to step back from what I was doing. Instead of being so worried about my ideals for success, it allowed me to think about my various teaching strategies more objectively, to consider what they afforded students or how they might limit students. I could then adjust what I was doing without worrying so much if that particular approach was a defeat or a victory. Teaching could focus on the process of learning and the relationships rather than being a battle.

Projections for the Future

In the future I want to approach each class realizing that it is composed of different students with different needs. As I continue to teach this class, I am brought back to this statement from *The Teaching Artist Handbook*: “Clarity about which specific techniques and concepts you want to transmit to students actually allows you greater flexibility and scope with which to create” (Jaffe et al., 2013, p. 10). Adding and removing projects and rearranging the order of projects to allow for a looser presentation of project outlines over the semester has helped to increase overall student confidence and their ability to think creatively. I also want to continue to grow as an artist and think of ways that my artistic experiences can overlap with my teaching.

Reflections and Conclusion

The process of writing my reflections helped change my overall satisfaction, perspective, sense of personal growth, and disposition toward school. I learned that the quality of my students’ artwork should not affect my happiness. I realized that the process, the discovery, and

the personal conversations and interactions are more important than the outcome of the physical product. This understanding about the importance of the process helped me relax while teaching about things that in the end don't truly matter. The insights gained from my reflective practice also helped me have more patience to work with those students who were challenging. I realized that I was more satisfied when I wasn't concerned with controlling everything that was going on in the classroom. Having the ability to go with the flow was healthier for my mental well-being than fighting to keep control. My written reflections in general helped me become more aware and reflective about what was actually going on in the classroom and how I was feeling about my teaching. Through contemplating my own artistic background, I learned that I wished I had been taught about certain things in my own education, such as my place as an artist and how to build a portfolio. In turn, I implemented these practices that were not available to me when I was a student into my classroom.

Actions that influenced my written reflections were primarily curriculum and classroom-structure based. Connecting to how I create as an artist allowed me to create open-ended projects in which students could focus either on the two-dimensional or the three-dimensional aspects of the prompt. I noted in my reflections that beginning the semester with more structure, then building upon techniques, and then loosening project outlines might be a helpful strategy for the future. I introduced multiple types of mediums in project prompts to help promote exploration of different types of art. In my reflections I noted that some students flourished utilizing the different medium options, while others were more comfortable with traditional mediums. While it was fun to present these new types of projects, I discovered that certain students struggled and others succeeded regardless of the difference in project type. I learned not to base my success as a teacher on whether everyone was successful or whether everyone liked what we were doing. I

learned from my own reflections and the comments from my students that their success and feelings about the work were constantly changing and that there was no single approach that would work for everyone. Actions such as trying to be more patient, focusing on personal interactions, and letting go made teaching more bearable for me.

Many outside influences altered my outlook on teaching. The experience I shared with Dr. Graham regarding student projects positively changed my perspective and helped me see that the imperfections in a student's artwork can make it more interesting. I was also influenced by art educators I studied during my thesis research. Ideas in *The Teaching Artist Handbook* were particularly helpful, as was artist Jorge Lucero's description about the JORGELUCEROSTUDYCOLLECTION, which has encouraged me to try new approaches in the classroom, affirmed my current methods, and motivated me to pursue deeper relationships with my students. Through my artistic reflection, I realized the difficulty inherent in trying to complete a natural artistic process while under the constraints associated with school. I need to focus more on what is realistically achievable given the constraints I face as an art teacher. In the past, attending district art teacher meetings and art shows made me feel like a failure. I have concluded that I should not compare myself to others who have been teaching longer or who may have different strengths or approaches to their students.

I experienced many ups and downs while working on my attitude about teaching. When I was extra-conscious about being positive and not controlling, I felt confident. When I wasn't purposely working on having a positive attitude, I often got caught off guard and found myself bothered by my original problems. I know it won't be easy for me to maintain a positive attitude. It takes a lot of mental capacity that some days I am not willing to give. It is an ongoing internal

battle that I will continue to fight because I know that the high of a good, stress-free day outweighs this difficulty.

Becoming more self-reflective was difficult for me because I felt like I needed to come up with a brand-new, earth-shattering observation each and every class period. I created an abundance of unnecessary stress for myself worrying whether my reflections were insightful enough. Through this process, however, I learned that even the simple and ordinary responses were useful in understanding myself and gave me clear ideas about my feelings even if they weren't explicitly stated in my reflections. I enjoyed looking back at my notes and seeing the subtle changes throughout my reflections, even if they were sometimes painful to write.

I now realize the importance of understanding my artistic self. Discovering my artistic self was stressful because I had never been able to do it before. Because I was worried that I wouldn't connect to the contemporary art world, I had a difficult time writing about it. However, having this knowledge about my artistic self helped me not only find a place in the art world but also make more artistic connections in my teaching. I can now relate to my projects and my students, which in turn creates a happier environment for me.

In the end, this self-study has helped me become more flexible, understanding, and forgiving of myself as an artist and a teacher. Sometimes, when you begin a journey, you think it will lead you one way, but you realize that you need to let it take you somewhere else. I learned to allow myself to be flexible enough to let the research lead me in unforeseen directions. I began by attempting to turn my teaching into my art practice; what I ended up doing was becoming a more reflective teacher.

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Appendix

ART FOUNDATION II

