Abstract

This research paints a portrait–both literally and figuratively–of the practice of an artist/researcher/teacher. Arts-based inquiry is used as a methodology for self-examination into the art, research, and teaching practice of the author, using the critical theories of unschooling and a/r/tography as a contextual platform.

Portrait of the Artist/Researcher/Teacher: A Reflection on the Nature of Learning

Rebecca Codack

Table of Contents

Page

Abstract………………………………………………………………………….. iv

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION…………………………………..……… 1

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW…..……………………….............. 3
A/r/tography…………………………………………………….......... 3
Unschooling.……………………………………………………………. 10

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY……………………………………… 15
Problems with Art Education…………………………………………… 15
Art-Based Inquiry………………………………………………………. 16
Confronting Hierarchy………………………………………………….. 19

CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS ……………………………………………..... 21
Painting and Thought Commence in Tandem…………………………... 21
Art Education From Within an Oppressive Science-Based Framework…... 22
Oppression of Inquiry…………………………………………………… 23
Oppression of Individuality……………………………………...…… 30
Oppression of Time……………………………………………...…… 31
Oppression from the Teacher…………………………………………… 32
Oppression of Assessment……………………………………………..... 33
Conclusion…………………………………………………………..... 37

CHAPTER FIVE: OVERALL CONCLUSIONS AND
RECOMMENDATIONS……………………………………………………… 40
Reflection as Investment in Oneself…………………………………… 40
Role Modeling and Dialogue…………………………………………… 45
Freedom……………………………………………………….............. 47

References.……………………………………………………….............. 49

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

The research found in this paper has been conducted in partial fulfillment of my Master of Education degree. I began taking courses towards this degree 2 years ago, nervous of the (perceived) rules of research and uninterested in any such undertaking. I didn't think I would ever be a researcher until I was introduced to qualitative methodologies such as arts-based inquiry and narrative inquiry during the course of my studies. Under the guidance of Dr. Carlo Ricci and Dr. Carmen Shields, both of whom have made a lasting impression on me, I discovered the critical theory of unschooling and the a/r/tography methodology. These two foci offered a compelling, arts-favourable theoretical framework and a respected, legitimate form of research that together suited my academic philosophy, artistic interests, and creative aptitudes. I was quite surprised, to say the least; throughout my entire schooling experience, pre- and postsecondary, art as a course of study has seemed respectable and legitimate to only a certain few. To learn that research would honour my artistic intelligence, that I could paint my way through to new understanding and viable research supported by theory and method, was something that made so much sense to me as an artist. At the same time, however, it made no sense at all that only in my graduate studies was I invited into such an opportunity… this freedom.

I have taught visual arts at the middle school level now for 3 years. In that time, my experience has proven to me that we are our environment. There is an enormous difference in how one learns, why one learns, and if one learns at all in the classroom

compared to at home; ultimately these conditions determine who we become. Though I have always loved artistic engagements, as an art student myself I did not do much art at school. I certainly filled my student timetable with as many art courses as it could handle, but I remember that I did the majority of my creative work at home, where it was quiet or musical, dark or bright, lonely or in the company of my choosing, or whatever I needed it to be to support an inspiring artistic atmosphere. At home, no bells rang dictating that I start or stop my art. I worked when the mood was right, which I continue to argue is the only proper time for making art.

Today I work to my own satisfaction, without a teacher or a rubric looming over me. Yet, I am also an art teacher, with obligations and responsibilities that at times conflict with my personal beliefs and passionate opinions. I am empowered to make professional judgments, but only to a point. If there is one thing I have learned in the course of my studies and in learning about myself over the past 2 years, I have come to a strong understanding of the precious value of freedom; creative freedom, professional freedom: freedom to learn, freedom to be. This research is a reflective account of my own learning by means of my own art making; ultimately though, it is an investigation into the freedom and oppression of art education today as I see it, and the effects it has on students and on me as an artist-teacher.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

There are two main theoretical concepts that I will be considering as I reflect on ways I can personally address the problems and issues with art education as I see them. A/r/tography and Unschooling are explained here in detail.

A/r/tography

Integration of Roles

A/r/tography is spelled symbolically, its first five characters representing the title roles of Artist, Researcher, and Teacher and the areas in between. It is one of its major tenets that for those to whom it applies these roles are automatically integrated by virtue of their concurrent presence. A/r/tography argues that this role integration is vital to any progressive art education practice (Irwin & de Cosson, 2004). I certainly believe–and it seems rather obvious–that someone who makes art themselves will be better equipped to teach it, with which much of the literature agrees. Around the mid-'90s, during the time when a/r/tography came into existence as a formal methodology, Stephens (1995) argued in alignment of its premise. He states,

> [Teachers] should attain a level of subject competency which is of a sufficiently advanced standard to enable him or her to engage and guide pupils in meaningful, high quality, worthwhile experiences leading to a broad understanding of a subject in its multifaceted expressions. At the same time, the professional competency of the potential teacher should be developed to enable him or her to become a reflective practitioner. (p. 3)

In other words, Stephens asserts that teachers ought to pursue their own learning, which for art teachers would involve engaging in their own art practice. Making such investigations will therefore lead to newfound conclusions, which would suggest that the artist and the teacher are researchers. The term *a/r/tographer* reflects this definition inclusively and comprehensively. It presents an image of the art teacher as forward thinking, a constant inquirer, and a practice-based reformist. Rather than assume the notion of the artist-researcher-teacher as an add-on split identity construct, Irwin and de Cosson (2004) refer to this unique interplay of artistic professional roles as existing within the "in-between spaces, spaces that are neither this nor that, but this *and* that" (p. 9). It suggests a new and specific identity born out of a tightly woven interactive and interinfluential synergy. Pinar (cited in Irwin & de Cosson, 2004) calls it "living a thirdness, a new third world in which tradition no longer constitutes true identity" (p. 29). This perspective offers a new operative place "of radical openness" (Pinar cited in Irwin & de Cosson) for thought and discovery concerning art education, one that would satisfy the recommendation of Temmerman's (2006) research into art teacher practice. She writes, "what is required [in art education] is a new 'breed of educators' who are 'proactive towards change and well connected to the broader community'" (p. 275). The artist-researcher-teacher combination makes possible a higher quality performance and a greater degree of effectiveness since each role functions as an informant to the others. As opposed to the teacher who cannot call upon the experience of another role, Schwartz (1975) writes of the long-term advantages of role integration, stating "[the] reinvestment of the artist-teacher into the educational pattern remains the most certain guarantee of …

the future development of the arts as a social phenomenon" (p. 210). The artist-teacher practices what he or she preaches and is a true role model for students.

Upon reviewing the literature on pedagogical strategies in art education, it becomes obvious that none of the artist, researcher, or teacher roles function as effectively in autonomy as they do when they are integrated. Many states support artist/teacher collaborative efforts, investing time, energy, and resources. Wolf (2008) points out that such partnerships are assembled with the goal of capitalizing on the state's creative wealth. She first acknowledges the advantages to these types of partnerships: Students benefit from the expertise in the community, and throughout the process, the teacher and artist are both presented with the possibility of gaining new perspectives, knowledge, and appreciation for one another's craft. Kind, de Cosson, Irwin, and Grauer (2007), in their study of a professional development initiative called *Learning Through the Arts*, found that the main benefit of artist/teacher pairings was the momentary learning between the artist and teacher, but that it did not necessarily translate to a pedagogical application. Wolf continues, discussing the greater number of disadvantages: The artist and teacher must develop rapport quickly and learn to trust one another; there is usually an inherent esoteric language barrier between artist and teacher and artist and students, which must first be overcome; and last all too often, due to time restrictions and personal agendas, an artist's residency in the classroom is too brief to establish a meaningful, lasting impact on the students and the teacher. The transference of skill and knowledge from artist to teacher and from teacher to artist is regretfully slim. Kind et al. note that much of the success of the *Learning Through the Arts* partnerships

had to be credited to an unpredictable, chance compatibility of the partners themselves, something that is not able to be facilitated and is not necessarily repeatable.

Even artists who enroll in a teacher's training program or teachers who study art to improve their art education practice face challenges until these roles are enmeshed and can function as a triad. A/r/tography stresses the spaces in between the roles, so that no one role is emphasized over another. Thornton (2005) defines the artist-teacher as "an individual who both makes and teaches art and is dedicated to both activities as a practitioner" (p. 167). Before this begins to happen effectively, however, many embody their roles in a hierarchical imbalance based on whichever role they came to know first. In many cases people start out as either an artist or a teacher and struggle with straddling the divide because their roles have not yet been assimilated. When it is the art world that artist-teachers come to know first, art provides the basis for their motivations and convictions. Adams (2007) shows how difficult the transition from artist practice to teacher practice is, as their identity essentially exists in flux, dependent on the social setting. He states, "the contrast between their practice as a critical artist and that of a regulated professional can be severe" (p. 264). The teaching profession requires standards of practice and censorship in the name of appropriateness and respectfulness for the age group, which may be entirely at odds with their values as an artist. At the opposite end of the spectrum, Upitis, Smithrim, and Soren (1999) focus on teachers becoming better at teaching art by pursuing their own artistry. The professional development-based model they look at is similar to a/r/tography in that it involves an in-depth investigation of any art form of one's choosing. Teachers are still paired with experts from the art community in order to draw on their strength, but the difference in

this partnership model is that the teachers are actively engaged in their own creative endeavours over an extended period of time (e.g., the winter months). The study finds that under such conditions, results have proven meaningful and lasting with regards to what teachers are then able translate to their art teaching practice.

Considering the role of the researcher, Eisner (1984) reports on the importance of context and perspective. Education research is done formally, often by those who are not also educators. The results of an education study that comes from any place that is disconnected from the classroom are usually not implemented for use in the classroom (Eisner). For real change to occur, research must be personal, meaningful, and function as ongoing daily practice, with the teacher as the most suitable primary researcher (Eisner). The problem of the transmission and relevancy of knowledge that occurs between an educational researcher and a teacher is very similar to the challenges of artist/teacher partnerships, as mentioned. So long as both parties come from a different background and perspective, language may be esoteric, opinions may not be equally shared, and the information one has to offer may not be totally relevant or appropriate in the eyes of the other. It is personal experience that bridges these gaps. Comprehensive experience such as Irwin and de Cosson (2004) speak of in a/r/tography makes for specialization and inevitable expertise. It happens only through the active occupation of each: art, research, teaching, and reflection thereof. The a/r/tography methodology sets the standard for best practice in art education.

Self-Reflection

Art, research, and teaching become meaningful when one positions oneself as a reflective practitioner. Reflection is the key that synthesizes experience and identifies

that which is of greatest personal importance and relevance (Irwin & de Cosson, 2004). Out of this, conclusions and strategic plans for action may come forth. Connelly and Clandinen (1988) encourage reflection as a means of situating and understanding oneself in the context of the present. They explain,

> The past shapes the future through the medium of a situation, and the future shapes the past through the stories we tell to account for and explain our situation. Where we have been and where we are going interact to make meaning for the situations in which we find ourselves. (p. 9)

Wilson (cited in Irwin & de Cosson) describes art practice as being naturally reflective, given the opportunity and time it provides for being alone with one's thoughts. Its strength is in the lived, felt, emotive, and descriptive nature of the experience. The unique personal connection renders it, in my opinion, a much deeper and more meaningful form of research. Lymburner (cited in Irwin & de Cosson) attests to the phenomenon of art as an informant in her life, stating, "this period of intense self-examination [while engaged in a/r/tography] invited me to perceive my world more closely, re-search the details of my practice, develop inner strength, and eventually, expand my repertoire of skills and sphere of influence" (p. 24). Even Picasso himself claims, "painting is just another way of keeping a diary" (cited in Cameron, 2002).

A Lifestyle of Ongoing Inquiry

Though a/r/tography is discussed here as a theoretical concept that I will ultimately employ as a research methodology, it should also be noted that a/r/tography fundamentally describes a lifestyle. The integration of the artist, researcher, and teacher is meant to carry on indefinitely, never ceasing or reaching a final outcome that would

suggest termination. Because it is based in experience and reflection, it would be counterintuitive and pointless to deny or avoid a/r/tographical practice at any stage in one's life. A/r/tographers continue their work of creating art with the intention of furthering thought, understanding that their inquiries will lead to future knowledge, inside a cycle where there is always more to inquire about and understand. Whereas traditional researchers most often follow some version of the scientific method that ends in conclusion, an a/r/tographer's research does not end there but continues on the journey of inquiry. Leggo (2007) writes, "If we think about the prefix re in researcher, we understand that our questing and questioning are always a returning, a turning again. This is a ruminative process … a verb, a journey, a flow" (p. 194). It is a hopeful, inspired, nonburdened sense of work without end. Citing the 2004 Australian *National Education and the Arts Strategy*, Temmerman (2006) recommends that lifelong learning should exist in conjunction with the arts, stating that art integration has been shown to improve the quality of learning and the quality of life according to public perception. A/r/tography positions the artist-researcher-teacher on the constant verge of enjoyment, discovery, innovation, and change.

Dialogue

A/r/tography underscores the value of discussion around art, research, and teaching as part of the process of reflecting on how to improve elements of practice. Combined dialogical and visual practice "reveal[s] what was once hidden, create[s] what has never been known, and imagine[s] what we hope to achieve" (p. 10). Pinar (cited in Irwin & de Cosson, 2004) suggests that dialogue is vital in a variety of circumstances: in the context of self-reflection; amongst a/r/tographers; in the public realm; and in the

classroom between teacher and student. Porter (cited in Irwin & de Cosson) presents her classroom as a safe environment for honest talk around art and the issues that are important to her students. She finds a positive response from this that it causes students to linger, including those who wouldn't ordinarily show initiative towards their own learning. While Porter uses dialogue as a platform for sparking thought, Pente (cited in Irwin & de Cosson) uses art as a platform for communication. Art is used as a teaching tool where language fails to say what she wishes to convey. For her, the picture says a thousand words. Likewise, Lymburner (cited in Irwin & de Cosson) creates visual journals that offer a kind of shared experience that words would not be capable of providing. They serve as a "wonderfully rich and evocative teaching and learning tool" for those who wish to "enter" her experience, as well as for herself; Lymburner uses visual journaling as a method of self-communication, reflecting comprehensively on her practice (p. 12).

Unschooling

Experience as Education

My discussion into unschooling will begin with the writings of John Holt (1982, 1989). His research and experience in the classroom have led him to an educational philosophy that touts simply living as the best possible teacher. He states logically, "it is impossible to be alive and conscious … without constantly learning things" (Holt, 1989, p. 157). Holt argues that children have a natural inquisitiveness that triggers their own self-guided learning and that formal teaching in schools does not foster this curiosity and interest. Instead the model of modern schooling actually destroys such curiosity, thus sabotaging their educational experience (Holt, 1989). Holt criticizes the classroom model

for several reasons. First, "teaching that the learner has not asked for is likely to impede and prevent his or her learning" (1989, p. 28). Students do not attend well to information they are being given if it does not interest them and if they have not asked for it. It must be a personal quest, a matter of their heart. Second, a classroom full of people within one's own peer group does not merit the makings of a safe environment for learning (Holt, 1989). Students are often afraid to participate within a classroom dynamic for fear of being wrong, ridiculed, and having their reputation damaged. Their learning is also subject to tension and anxiety in the presence of an adult from whom they seek approval (Holt, 1982). Students develop coping mechanisms to avoid such situations, all of which further destroy opportunities for open inquiry and learning. Students are not taught the value of failure to the long-term concept of their success. Holt (1982) states, "we should see that failure is honorable and constructive, rather than humiliating" (p. 68). Children however think that answers are absolute, a belief that is perpetuated wittingly or unwittingly by their authority figures (Holt, 1982). They do not trust their own thinking–a terrible problem in any case, but especially in the subjective study of visual arts. Furthermore, the learning in a classroom on any given subject is capped and halted upon the completion of a culminating activity. This sends the message that learning should be terminated after devoting a certain amount of time to it. It is a message that doesn't fit with the idea of practice: returning to something over and over so as to learn incrementally; neither does it fit with the characterization of excellence. Third, perhaps of most resonance especially in light of these realities, Holt doubts that any teacher is responsible for another person's understanding. He says, "why *don't* they learn what we teach them? … *Because* we teach them – that is, try to control the contents of their

minds" (1982, p. 231). He states further, "the best rules are still the ones that learners make out of their own experience" (p. 181). Holt (1989) suggests that becoming educated is not the act of acquiring knowledge, rather that children "create knowledge, as scientists do, by observing, wondering, theorizing, and then testing and revising these theories" (p. 102). Only a method such as this would be memorable and trustworthy enough to support a lasting understanding.

Holt makes a series of recommendations for facilitating a child's learning through his or her life experience. He highlights the value of moral support for what the child shows interest in, but underscores the necessity of *not* teaching, which would only get in their way (Holt, 1989). Holt advocates for making a child's experience as real as possible, connecting it to the real world in every possible situation, making it accessible and transparent. That which is relevant and observable in life is worth learning and will be remembered, though sadly this is rarely the case for learning inside a classroom.

Oppression of Standardized Education

Paolo Freire analyzes the cause and effect relationships and critiques the many downfalls of the present day school system. He recognizes first of all that there is no such thing as a neutral education–it is built either from freedom or oppression, ours being the latter and for systematic reasons (Freire, 1990). Upon examination of our system, wherein students are told what to learn, what to read, when to turn their brains on, what answers are acceptable, how to behave, what rules to follow, et cetera, it is brutally evident that their learning is not the most important objective. Instead, their education exists in a relationship of dominance and repression, "with the ideological intent (often not perceived by educators) of indoctrinating [students] to adapt to the world of

oppression . . . carried out in the name of freedom, order and social peace (that is, the peace of the elites)" (Freire, p. 65). Learning in such conditions does not liberate one to explore and imagine for oneself; therefore student potential and growth are stunted. After decades of learning like this, a person is released into the outside world that he or she has largely been kept away from, where oppression in the workplace persists and perpetuates the social class hierarchy (Freire). As those in the upper class know, the key to keeping the system going and to securing their spot on top is prolonging the oppression of others. As long as people remain ignorant of the fact that it doesn't have to be this way, their behaviours will be prescribed and they will be tolerant of what is essentially their own dehumanization (Freire).

To break the cycle, Freire advocates for a dialogical pedagogy whereby students are encouraged to come into their own consciousness, question without penalty, and begin to think for themselves. Freire (1990) states, "consciousness is in essence a 'way towards' something apart from itself, outside itself, which surrounds it and which it apprehends by means of its ideational capacity. Consciousness is thus by definition a method," (p. 56). He encourages active communication between adults and students in order to show respect for their thoughts, ideas, and individuality as they relate to their learning; for only through dialogue and the authentic thinking that comes of it can life hold meaning (Freire). As teachers adopt this new model and move away from the constant narration in the classroom that suggests the teacher is all knowing, the students gain independence and begin to own their autonomy. They grow from being a passive receptacle for knowledge–which implies a powerlessness and the assumption that they are merely in the world but not part of the world–to a motivated inquirer who seeks to

learn within meaningful, personal contexts (Freire). Freire agrees with Holt that "students, as they are increasingly posed with problems relating to themselves in the world and with the world, will feel increasingly challenged and obliged to respond to that challenge" (p. 68). In such case, the apathy and avoidance prevalent in schools today would be obsolete. The dialogue process requires a mutual respect between parties; in this context, the teacher too becomes like a student, with no prescribed outcome or inherent truth to be uncovered. All are opened up to the benefits of the freedom of true discovery.

Freire recognizes that because the world is in constant flux and because free learners exist as an integral part of the world, it is all the more reason to remain in constant reflection and communication about the world (1990). When one assumes that, due to the changing nature of life and one's environment, he or she will be in a state of becoming for as long as he or she is alive, then talking is logically the natural means by which we understand and go about life, plan the course, analyze the past, and create the journey that will be uniquely ours. He describes this combination of thoughtful reflection and active communication as a praxis that, in this sense, holds in it the ability to transform the world as we know it.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

Problems with Art Education

As an artist and an art teacher, I am very aware of the difference between how visual art practice operates in the classroom as opposed to out of one's choosing. In my experience, I see that art lives a dichotomous existence depending on the environmental conditions that surround it. Crum (2007) reports that art projects initiated at home by one's volition are wide open in scope, free of time constraints, and are therefore seen as an enjoyable endeavour. In the classroom, however, Holt (1969) finds curriculum and assessment criteria negate one's freedom–and the essence of art itself. As a result, art practice for many of my students does not carry a sense of joy, play, curiosity, experimentation, discovery, release, personal connection, or mental transportation the way it does for me when I make art. My students and I understand art in fundamentally different ways because of the difference in how it is presented and our subsequent approach.

I have been concerned for quite some time with the way my students perceive art practice, especially as it relates to my role as their teacher. I believe creativity is meant to be an enjoyable, personal journey into one's own imagination, guided by one's own decisiveness. Instead, I see hesitation and insecurity in my students' approach to their artistry. I worry about the symptoms I observe: apathy, avoidance, conformity, inhibition, and mediocrity. I am disturbed by the requirements of my job to quantify and solidify that which is inherently subjective and abstract. I disagree with forcing art

practice on students who are noninclined or do not have the headspace to summon their artistry as soon as the bell goes, or who simply aren't innately creative in a visual arts sense. Moreover I have been troubled by this internal conflict: that I don't fully know what to make of all of this in my own mind. As their teacher, I am the one administering a curriculum that is not theirs, in a context they did not choose. In light of my questions and concerns, the purpose of this study is to acquaint myself with theoretical concepts such as unschooling and a/r/tography, positioning myself within or against them to develop a clearer picture of who I am in the midst of it all.

Art-Based Inquiry

In order to gather my thoughts and ponder ideas, I will require time dedicated to self-reflection. Freire (1990) supports actively defining and redefining oneself in context as the key to mental clarity and autonomy. He states, "liberation is a praxis: the action and reflection of men upon this world in order to transform it" (p. 65). Methods of self-reflective analysis may take on different appearances for different individuals, such as journal writing, exercise, or conversation with a trusted friend. Irwin (2005) states,

> In a/r/tography, visual, performative and written processes are enacted as a living practice of artmaking, researching, teaching, and learning in processes similar to our understanding of action research as living inquiry. Sites of living inquiry may interface, intersect and interrogate assumptions in order to inspire thoughtful action. (Renderings section, ¶ 5).

My inquiry will tie in with my professional roles, as I consider art education through my own art making. Stewart (1999) states, "visual research models can be described as processes of reflective, critical inquiry which are concerned with the advancement or

extension of knowledge, new discoveries, solutions to problems and conceptual progress" (p. 3).

As a practicing artist, my intentions are to use visual images to communicate thoughts, ideas, and issues; after all, I believe the primary purpose of art is to draw attention to and address phenomena in the world. But discussion does not begin only once an image is complete; an artist is involved in personal dialogue throughout the creation process as a result of their intimate engagement with the visual imagery. Painting will serve as a platform for splaying my thoughts, and in the process I hope to solidify for myself ways in which I may interpret and apply educational theory to my practice, both as an artist and as a teacher.

In recent years, art-based inquiry has gained acceptance as a legitimate form of research. Though it is often challenged for its inherent subjectivity, art-based research shows respect for multiple intelligences theory and recognizes that more traditional methodologies are not all encompassing and do not do justice to certain research foci. McNiff (1998) writes, "we must get beyond the attempt to impose a single type of research onto every life situation" (p. 12). Quantitative methods that have formed the standard of research in decades past are not only nonconducive to certain ways of knowing, they are also not functional for those who are not logical-mathematically wired. Robinson and Aronica (2009) write:

> Our aptitudes are highly personal. They may be for general types of activity, like math, music, sport, poetry, or political theory. They can also be highly specific—not music in general, but jazz or rap. Not wind instruments in general, but the

> flute. Not science, but biochemistry. Not track and field, but the long jump. (p. 22)

Edwards (1999) writes that artists for example rely heavily on the right hemisphere of the brain, which is the subdominant visual perceptual area responsible for artistic ability. It makes sense that research applications complement the strengths of the researcher and that interest and pleasure would also factor into such endeavours, serving as intrinsic motivation.

At the University of British Columbia, art as research–specifically a/r/tography is a widely used methodology. Irwin (2005) writes,

> To be engaged in the practice of a/r/tography means to inquire in the world through an ongoing process of art making in any artform and writing not separate or illustrative of each other but interconnected and woven through each other to create additional and/or enhanced meanings. A/r/tographical work is rendered through the methodological concepts of contiguity, living inquiry, openings, metaphor/metonymy, reverberations and excess which are enacted and presented/performed when a relational aesthetic inquiry condition is envisioned as embodied understandings and exchanges between art and text, and between and among the broadly conceived identities of artist/researcher/teacher. A/r/tography is inherently about self as artist/researcher/teacher yet it is also social when groups or communities of a/r/tographers come together to engage in shared inquiries, act as critical friends, articulate an evolution of research questions, and present their collective evocative/provocative works to others. (Home section, ¶ 1).

For me personally as an artist/researcher/teacher, painting will support deep thought and quality reflection of my lived experience in terms of my occupation, preoccupation, and passion. It will thus constitute real and viable research.

Confronting Hierarchy

In painting my way through my research I hope to underscore the value art holds in my life, juxtaposed to the relative disrespect it is granted in the school system. Just as with research methodologies, logical-mathematical school subjects are generally regarded as more important and receive more support from administrators, teachers, parents, and subsequently by students. Eisner (2003) asserts this is largely because their products are measurable, quantifiable, and seemingly dependable. Objectivity leaves little room for teacher assessment and evaluation to be brought into question, and so it is thus preferred. Robinson (2006) argues that this hierarchical arrangement is "benignly mistaken." He says, "there were no public systems of education before the nineteenth century. They all came into being to meet the needs of industrialism; so the hierarchy is reached on [the idea that] the most useful subjects for work are at the top." Regardless, the implication for arts subjects (visual arts, music, drama, dance) is they are given less emphasis, are granted less class time, and must function within a limited scope. The potential repercussions for students whose strengths are in the arts may include a lack of confidence, a poor sense of self-worth, feelings of isolation and personal conflict because society in majority does not willingly support what they do best (Robinson). I was this student: discouraged in following my inner directive and frustrated because I was told I would not "make it" by making art. My passion was oppressed time and again by the people whose supposed mandate it was to help me find and hone it in the first place. I am

researching via painting, not only because it is most natural for me but in order to support the argument that subject hierarchy is subjective and personally constructed. A/r/tography "recognizes the insufficiency of previous methods or disciplines while simultaneously resisting the formation of new criteria" (Relational Inquiry section, ¶ 2). To me the findings of an arts-based methodology are more trustworthy than objective concrete evidence due to its intuitive, personal, and emotive nature. As Watrin (1999) puts it, art-based research "seizes the fullness of lived experience by describing, interpreting, creating, reconstituting and revealing meaning" (p. 93).

The intention of this study is not to generalize to a whole population, but to exist as a portrait of my experience, both literally and figuratively. I know that not everyone is an artist and not everyone will be able to relate to my method of choice–our societal systems and structures are a testament to that. For those that do not relate directly, I would implore these readers-especially teachers–to consider the findings of this research through the lens of those who do. I write from this perspective mindful of the students in my classroom who may be staged to encounter a similar experience in their schooling and for the teachers who are poised to do something about it.

CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS

Painting and Thought Commence in Tandem

Filled with the words of Holt, Freire, and Irwin in my mind, I begin to sort through it all by sketching on paper to create an image of the various philosophies as they relate to art education. This form of organizing is fundamental to my understanding anything; it is the first step I take in any undertaking of familiar or nonfamiliar territory. Drawing pictures and making diagrams speak sensibly to me in a way nothing else does. The visual helps me to grasp, synthesize, and process what I've read, like a translation in my first language. My pictures map out the starting points for the discussion I feel I must have with myself after having been introduced to the ideas of unschooling and a/r/tography. Painting sets the stage for a reflective inner dialogue, giving me time and an outlet for deep thinking so that I can fully understand such theoretical concepts and position myself within them.

Figures emerge of a little girl and her older self as a young woman, as I think about how art starts in a person's life; the freedom and intuition with which one approaches art making before they have had any schooling, and the oppressiveness that ensues with teaching. Art is a large and important aspect of life in one's first few years. Parents typically encourage their children's creativity to flow freely, without rules or boundaries. It aids in manual dexterity, develops imagination, and contributes to a healthy human spirit, to say the least. Yet, at some premature point along a child's

journey, cumbersome theory and expectations are administered, the encouragement of free expression wanes, and the artistic compulsion and interest that once flourished begins to flatline. As I reflect on my own creative life, I can certainly identify ways in which my attitude, behaviour, and performance have been affected by the stifling nature of the teaching system. I also realize my experience as a student is paralleled by the experience I provide for my own art students. Common themes come to light, such as worry over grading, conformity, apathy, and mediocrity. They are interconnected problems, each one a cause and an effect of another, and all rooted in an oppressive approach that poisons creative freedom. Robinson (2008) states, "I work a lot globally … most education systems, in one way or another, suppress creative capacities. I think it's a tragedy for individuals. I think it's a catastrophe for the future of our economies and our communities." It is an approach that erroneously inherently disrespects the necessary process of art, which is inextricably linked to learning. These topics, from the perspectives of unschooling and a/r/tography, form the basis for my critique of visual arts education today.

Art Education From Within an Oppressive Science-Based Framework

I begin painting, curious about the inception of the school system and how our current approach to teaching came into existence. What caused and who made the decisions that have amounted to the conditions within which schools operate every day? The climate for teaching and learning in the art classroom is met with challenges on many levels as a result of the way knowledge is fundamentally understood and defined. Robinson (2008) describes the modern education system as a young institution, built for specific purposes under a particular political climate. He criticizes,

> Most education systems around the world … were mainly invented in the 19th century to meet the needs of industrialism, and in almost every way they are modeled on the values, ideas, and interests of an industrial economy. For the most part they ignore the nature of individual talent and ability … they're locked in an old model.

Eisner (2003) reports on the influence of psychology, which was formally established around the same time as the education system. Promoted by forerunners such as Thorndike as a *science* of the mind, psychology was touted as being logical, sequential, and outcome oriented; it seemed to offer the predictability and reliability that people could trust in relation to the workings of the mind. Thus, the education system followed suit, adopting a similar science-based structure. Eisner (2002) explains,

> [The model] depended upon measurement and thus could claim to be objective. It was experimental and therefore could make things happen, something that educators wanted to do. It put a premium on control so that explanation was possible, something that was believed important. (p. 378)

Thus, with few exceptions teaching and learning today reflect this model, regardless of its conduciveness to the subject matter. According to Eisner (2002), a nonflexible framework such as this is unnatural especially in the arts, giving rise to numerous problematic side effects. I couldn't agree more.

Oppression of Inquiry

Eisner (2003) recognizes that placing a heavily weighted value on the outcome of a task, as educators do for the purpose of assessment quantification, inevitably minimizes the presumed value of inquiry. Under such a framework, the process–that is, the point at

which learning is actively happening–is undermined. Holt (1969) points out that children are naturally inclined to learning and that it is by means of an intuitive sense of curiosity that children interact with the world in order to make sense of it. Furthermore, Wolf (2008) states that when the freedom to learn according to a natural flow of discovery is compromised, learning loses its excitement and mystery. Students are storehouses of potential energy for learning, yet they sit dormant while educators push the agenda of the curriculum. With the final outcome to a learning endeavour already predetermined, interest and pleasure wane, leaving little motivation to complete the task. This kind of situation is forced on a student, which Deci (cited in Griffith, 1998) states is nonconducive to real learning. He states that there are two essential parts to having the self-motivation that would be needed for inquiry-based learning; these are: authenticity, that one acts true to one's values and wishes; and autonomy, that one remains in complete control of one's behaviour. But the possibility for authenticity and autonomy of the student body would threaten the present outcome-based system; instead students are required to learn as they are told, not as they wish. As Godin (2009) puts it, "it's easy to underestimate how difficult it is for someone to become curious - that for seven, ten, fifteen years of school, you are required to not be curious. Over and over and over again, the curious are punished." How infuriating it is that these conditions are ubiquitous in our centers of learning, perpetuated by teachers–myself included–who have not stopped to examine the backwardness of their actions.

As I paint, I transcend in my mind back to my classroom, to the mistakes I realize I have made even just recently. As is the case with most projects in most subjects, students are given the same assignments they've seen previous students complete the year

before, and the year before that. Teachers typically do not want to "reinvent the wheel" if they don't have to, and besides, predictability makes teaching an easier task. We do not model originality to our students but complain when they fail to submit their own bona fide work reflective of themselves. I have a collection of exemplars–completed projects–I put on display to illustrate along what lines students should be thinking and to show what I deem to be acceptable. By the time they are ready to begin their work, the project expectations have been drilled into them so concretely that they cannot afford and do not think it is their place to waver from them. They are told to be as creative as they can after being shoved into a tiny box. Meanwhile, I keep painting. The sketch I started with has now grown organically into a split scene, with the younger girl in a house on the left and the older girl in a studio space on the right. The scenes meld into one somewhere in the center, as the paint blends gradually in a seamless transition. I don't quite know what this will look like when I'm done. For now, that's not important; I am lost in my own world, and I'm enjoying myself. Unlike my students, my artistic direction comes only from the continual interaction with the paint on the canvas. I will know what I'm working towards when it reveals itself to me.

The one-size-fits-all curriculum of the outcome-based structure expects every student to learn a bit of everything, from science and math, to music and art, to languages and second languages, and so on. Today's student is a jack-of-all-trades, master of none. The ministry puts a positive spin on this, dubbing students as "well-rounded," but what that really means is that they aren't exceptionally good at anything, or at least not that the school system can take credit for. Robinson (2008) decries,

> I've lost track of the numbers of people I've met – very brilliant people often – who went through the whole of their education and never discovered a thing they were good at. An awful lot of people think they're not good at anything.

Gone are the days of the child prodigy, the expert, who would have been given the opportunity to focus his or her time in one specific area of specialization. Csikszentmihalyi (2004) finds that expertise takes time:

> It has become a truism in the study of creativity that you can't be creating anything with less than ten years of technical knowledge immersion in a particular field. It takes that long to begin to change something in a way that it's better than what was there before.

In the current school system, it is entirely impossible time-wise to get good at anything. Where there are those who do manage to dodge the traditional system to concentrate on their given talent, their efforts pay off often to critical acclaim and recognition. Take for example Sidney Crosby, who was drafted as the first pick of the 2005 NHL Entry Draft and the age of 17 (Sidney Crosby, n.d.); or Alexandra Nechita, who by the age of 16 had her abstract expressionist artwork commissioned by *The Academy Awards* (Alexandra Nechita, n.d.); or Craig Kielburger, who at the age of 12 had established *Free the Children*, an international organization that has since become the world's largest network of children helping children through education (Craig Kielburger, n.d.). These three are athletes, artists, and activists on the inside that have been afforded the opportunity to live their lives as athletes, artists, and activists also on the outside. In my opinion, metaphorically speaking, it is as if the school system takes the child who would be a light bulb and commands him or her function as a heater. A light bulb can certainly operate

adequately as a heater, but truthfully will function much better in the role it was created for, as a light radiator. By asking a light bulb to multitask–or a student to spread their learning over an array of subjects and disciplines–educators deny them the opportunity of fulfilling their greatest possibilities. These examples are a snapshot of young people who did not maintain a traditional schooling experience and have benefited because of it. Society values expertise; the school system does not.

Inside this lack of freedom there are what Fried (2005) refers to as "pseudolearners": students who do not give up on school completely but develop coping mechanisms to get through the system and be done with it (p. xi). This attitude, having been fueled by a lifetime of one's student career, logically often extends past graduation, leading people to seek out with their trained nearsightedness simple extrinsic goals in their postschool afterlife (Fried, p. xi). Says Fried,

> The game of school is so identified with the culture of our education system as to seem both invisible and immutable. And yet our acquiescence virtually guarantees wholesale educational mediocrity, even where test scores are on the rise and drop-outs on the decline. (p. xvii)

The workforce, likewise, is littered with average-level performers: people who have been force-fed a curriculum not of their choosing and who have grown tolerant of their entrapment. Such ones are like frogs in a pot of water; as the temperature rises they simply adjust to their external conditions without taking these changes seriously, until soon enough the water boils and it is too late. This is the inheritance of a school system that bemoans a poor and lasting legacy.

Teaching to an outcome suggests finality of learning, whereas learning guided by inquiry can keep going nonlinearly and develop exponentially in a snowball effect. Children are naturally inclined to learning. It is purely by an intuitive curiosity that they begin to interact with their world in order to make sense of it (Holt, 1969, p. 184). This process does not stop at a particular place or time in childhood; rather it exists all along but is denied the freedom of action it deserves. Fried (2005) observes, "curiosity is a delicate, often individual phenomenon . . . children's capacity for sensory awareness is vivid and intense" (p. 59). Children possess within them everything they need to discover, interpret, and interact with the world. They are capable of retaining volumes of information and have abundant patience, so long as they have interest in it. In observing my classes on any given day, I realize that students are storehouses of total potential energy for learning, yet they sit dormant while educators fumble to light a fire with nonfuel sources. The catalyst–whether for children or adults, like me in preparation for conducting this research–is what captures one's interest! Students will perform dramatically well and with dedication for that which they have a passion. For example, students who love hockey know hockey exceptionally well. They understand the details of the game, can recite the mathematical statistics of the players, can discuss cause and effect relationships of the game, and summarize the events of a particular season. They will integrate hockey into other subject areas as well; in my teaching experience, it is often reflected in their choice of literature, their artistic expressions, and their personal writing. It may even lead to further investigations, such as the topography of the community, as the avid hockey player seeks out new spots to play in. The point is, interest level can carry learning to unexpected places and create a comfort zone where

there otherwise wouldn't be one. Eisner (2003) agrees a process-based approach to education would open students up to the kind of curriculum they are inherently attuned to. As I paint, I try to imagine my schooling experience had it been constructed in the form of my choosing. What kind of artist would I be today? Surely with myself in control of my cognitive development I would have devoted more of my precious years to doing what I loved most, practicing to get better. Most of what I know now I consider to have learned on my own, self-taught through experience, with the majority of my creative growth happening after I graduated from my Bachelor of Fine Arts undergraduate degree. Likewise, most of what my art students demonstrate that they know I am certain they arrived at ultimately on their own as well. Those who are most interested in art are also those who tend to excel in art because they practice it in their spare time, at home, without guidance. It is a simple, logical correlation. Csikszentmihalyi (2004) reports on the phenomenon of losing all sense of time and place when one is deeply engaged in an activity of interest. He finds that people reported their happiest times throughout their week were during such instances, "when [they were] doing what [they] really like to do," and subsequently their "work [was] worth doing for its own sake." This opportunity is similar to being in an ecstatic state, which Csikszentmihalyi calls being "in flow." It happens when intense challenges are met with highly developed skills, therefore eliciting a great sense of intrinsic value for a person. Upitis (2005) observes that teachers who are practicing artists identify with the value and meaning derived from being "in flow" yet find it near impossible to nurture this phenomenon within their students due to the unfavourable conditions of the school structure. I have observed the same, as noted throughout this paper. Upon review of several arts-based approaches to learning, Sinner,

Leggo, Irwin, Gouzouasis and Grauer (2006) conclude that a strong sense of explorative openness is the key to constructing "dynamic knowledge," the result of which is that the learner often arrives at a deeper understanding of oneself and their relationship with others (p. 1238). On a large scale, academic freedom and the habitual will to inquire lead to thoughtful, intelligent action that is crucial to the needs and development of society as a whole.

Oppression of Individuality

Eisner (2003) further asserts that teaching to a specified outcome assumes uniformity and promotes homogenization. Teachers are obliged to cover the same expectations in the curriculum for each student with consideration for measures of standardization, regardless of the students' talents, interests, and abilities (Eisner). To use science terminology, every student within the science-based model operates as a unique variable; as such, outcomes will be fraught with anomalies and results will be meaningless. More important, assigning an outcome from the start robs the teacher and learner of creative discovery and denies the developing mind freedom of thought and expression, which Dewey (1984) argues is a crime against democracy. Assuming a global standpoint, Leggo (2007) expresses his concern for a world that has been constructed from this science perspective; an objectified, rationalized presentation of one singular worldview (as is generally the case in education today, as curriculum outcomes would indicate) does not allow for multiplicity of thought or acceptance of diversity.

Curriculum aside, Freed and Parsons (1997) state that schools operate with rigidity and a high level of enforcement necessary so as to control student behaviour to achieve their given outcomes. Epstein (2007) concurs, "to make people 'civil,' we need

them to learn to conform to a wide variety of rules and practices, a process social scientists call 'socialization'" (p. 253). School codes of conduct quash creativity and individuality in favour of a student culture that is taught to conform so as to expedite curricular demands, rather than being taught to think for themselves and run the risk of operative agendas being challenged (Freed & Parsons). At my school, our staff meetings are frequently monopolized by teachers concerned with students who break the rules–the gum chewers, cell phone carriers, wrong doorway enterers, and incorrect side of the hallway walkers–to such an extent that our time is often entirely devoted to devising strategies to correct these behaviours rather than talking about anything that matters to their actual learning. I keep painting and realize that in the present moment I am chewing gum and synching it involuntarily to the same repetitious motion of my brush, in a subconscious total body rhythm. It feels good.

Oppression of Time

Another major concern of outcome-based pedagogy is how little time teachers have to get their students to attain the specified outcomes. This pressure interrupts and devalues the process of learning. Griffith (1998) observes that teachers are often forced to forego exceptional lesson plans because time will not accommodate them. Similarly, Holt (1969) observes that students must relinquish their engagement in projects or topics that have perhaps captivated them, to allow for the curriculum clock to plod on. He reports on his experience with 6-year-olds in the visual arts classroom: "Under the pressure of the curriculum, the academic lockstep, and … the nervous parents, worried about their children's 'progress,' … the children began to feel, after a while, that there was no time for art, that it was not serious" (p. 135). Additionally he notes, "children are

sensitive to what adults value" and look for their elders' approval to help them form their own opinions (Holt, p. 135). If practice makes perfect, then giving up half way is a sure route to mediocrity and dissatisfaction.

Oppression from the Teacher

Usually in an outcome-based set-up, the teacher is positioned as the omniscient leader whose words and example should be followed so that the curriculum expectations are met. Inevitably year after year, I have students submit work that resembles precisely the example I created to provide them with. To me, this is a serious problem and one that I am not willing to accept full responsibility for. While some may say that imitation is the highest form of flattery, I contend that it is the pitiful result of a system that has for centuries controlled student thought and stunted imagination. As Freed and Parsons (1997) put it, "left-brained American schools have rarely placed an emphasis on creative, critical thinking. Our schools have historically churned out graduates who … lack problem-solving skills … the child exists only to parrot the instructor's thoughts and ideas" (p. 125). For an art instructor this means professional failure; how can one teach art–which is to teach ideas in a field of practice that strives for originality–and in so doing cause one's students to merely copy and imitate? The challenge is to encourage creative thinking and create a classroom environment where students can bend "the rules" when it makes sense to. Visual art is a powerful subject area where discussion can begin that will hopefully bring some students to the postmodern realization that there are no absolutes in life. In other words, understanding that the black-and-white attitude promoted in schools isn't necessary is a small step toward redirecting society's left-brained traditional beliefs.

The more people that begin to think differently and are freed from the rigidity of the structured box, the better the chances are for educational reform.

Though clearly poised from a cognitive, outcome-based perspective, the Ontario Art Curriculum refers to the teacher as a "provider" of hands-on activities. I take this to mean that since learning happens through experiences, the teacher is therefore merely a facilitator and that the onus is on the student to learn through the experiential opportunities set out for them (Ministry of Education and Training, 1998, p.5). Practicing artists understand that the noise of instruction pales to the compelling voice of intuition. Jung theorized, "the creation of something new is not accomplished by the intellect but by the play instinct acting from inner necessity" (cited in Cameron, 2002, p. 75). To interject in this process with theory, opinion, and direction would be suppressive and counterintuitive. Even as I continue with my painting, I am convinced by means of the process that it is only from a self-guided exploration of media and thought that creativity meets its maximum potential. Elkins (2001) states, "art is ideally or potentially universal: it has to do with the people's feelings and inner lives, and so it isn't a specialty known only to a few individuals" (p. 63). Though my students may be inspired by the images and discussion I present to them in class and though they are able to act on these experiences, I do not attribute this to their having been taught how to do anything. Elkins says it this way:

> [Teachers] know *what* they are saying, but they don't know *when* it will connect, or whether it will do any good for the student. To some people, this is not a bad way to work . . . but it still means that art is not taught. (p. 99)

Oppression of Assessment

Following the stringent science-based philosophy that standardization is a sign of good practice, the Ministry of Education and Training (1998) preaches consistency in assessment and evaluation of student artwork. Evaluation tools are written to clearly define what sorts of qualities best match a particular level. It is hierarchical, thus erroneously implying that art exists in a socially accepted hierarchy as well. It implies a universal aesthetic which all students are meant to strive for and that any work that diverts from this specifically directed vane of beauty simply isn't beautiful or of aesthetic value. This is a dangerous terrain for schools to be treading on in teaching what comprises attractiveness. It is heavily laden with social implications that I personally am not willing to back. It is especially ironic that schools would promote a specified aesthetic in their art curriculum given the fact that art history itself is made up of artists and their masterpieces that defied the status quo of their day and challenged society's notions of what it meant to be aesthetically pleasing. New styles, techniques, and images were frequently met with criticism and skepticism, yet in time they have been recognized for their innovation and contribution to art history. Standard rubrics simply do not liberate young artists to discover the unimagined aesthetic of the future.

Even when a teacher does evaluate student artwork according to a rubric, I notice, as I am sure most teachers do, that the results are naturally highly subjective. Guskey (2002) confirms in his research that teachers admit their final evaluative decisions are influenced by four main forces: the policies and practices they experienced as students; their personal philosophies of teaching and learning; administrative policies at various levels; and what they learned at their university's faculty of education. Add to this

environmental influence such as the teacher's mood, the time of day, the order in which a student's work is marked, et cetera, and one has the makings of a very nonstandardized "standard" mark. Guskey notes, "rigid adherence to points-driven systems may appear to bring objectivity and precision to the grading process … this objectivity and precision are far more imaginary than real" (p. 241). The high degree of subjectivity inherent in art evaluation virtually renders the whole process void.

Moreover, reporting on visual art is superfluous to the concrete evidence of the child's work and the immeasurability of mental development, as mentioned earlier. A child's handmade artwork will give the parent an immediate indication of the manual abilities and sense of the principles and elements that the child possesses. Any written accompaniment such as an evaluation by a teacher would be redundant.

I then ask myself, why do we grade students in the first place? Freed and Parsons (1997) lament over a school system whose traditional modus operandi does not serve students the way that it claims; "letter grades are a remnant of an antiquated educational system that was designed to produce obedient yet unimaginative foot soldiers. Grades perpetuate the notion that the teacher is the absolute authority" (p. 125). Additionally Guskey (2002) plainly states that grading and reporting are "not essential to teaching or to learning. In other words, teachers don't need grades or reporting forms to teach well, and students don't need them in order to learn" (p. 189). The side effects of grading are arguably most detrimental in the context of the arts. The writing in a rubric suggests to students that only work that matches that which is defined there is of value, denying creative freedom and betraying the students' own standards. Work comes not from an inner passion or exploration of thoughts but from a nonflexible points-driven academic

economy that controls their performance as far as what they have to do to get a particular mark and feel successful (Guskey). I see firsthand every day the conflict, stress, and dilemma of students who cannot follow their vision for a particular project because the rubric won't support them, or of students who have made something only to realize afterwards that the rubric won't account for their kind of creativity. They worry about their marks; they've been taught that they matter. So I make a point with every assignment to downplay the assessment. I make it clear that I would not grade their work if it weren't in my job description; that I recognize it is not possible to do things perfectly on a first attempt; and that really what is most important is the lesson each person takes from the process and the experience. While I like to think that hearing such sentiments coming from their teacher may make a difference in quelling their fears, I know they still anticipate receiving their mark. I paint in my studio, thankful not to have to answer or seek approval from anyone but myself.

Furthermore, stipulating educational outcomes will not provide the opportunity for a completely comprehensive assessment. Regardless, the Ministry of Education and Training (1998) persists in its academic approach, speaking largely to an intellectual capacity for learning while ignoring the kinesthetic connection. Art is produced through a synergetic continuum, involving the mind and body in tandem. Its nonmaterial outcomes are likewise mental and physical: fine motor skills and manual dexterity are honed with active media manipulation, while nonverbal communication skills and visual literacy are also developed with practice. There is no way to accurately evaluate embodied learning that takes place when one creates art; it is immeasurable and perhaps understood only through self-reflective analysis. It is impossible and inappropriate for

anyone other that the artist to assess the thought structures, patterns, processes, debates, connections, and conclusions that occur while engaged in art. Nor is it possible or proper to place judgment on the level of another artist's pleasure, satisfaction, and self-fulfillment while engaged in an artistic activity. All of these facets contribute to what make up an artist's personal critique of their success upon reflection of their work. In its attempt to standardize education across the province, the Ministry has disregarded these less concrete, more emotional aspects of art making, therefore nullifying their goal of helping parents "to have a clear understanding of their child's progress" and creating an "education for all" (Ministry of Education and Training, 1998, p. 5). The learning that takes place within the context of visual art is broad, nonlinear, and undefined; it cannot be broken down and quantified; art doesn't come packaged neatly and logically as such.

Conclusion

My painting is complete. I have juxtaposed two images of myself, first as a 5-year-old girl and second as my present self at 25 years old. To the left, little me is colouring on the wall with crayon. It is a childish drawing of fish and water that gradually blends into the image of a maturely rendered landscape, painted by big me. Simultaneously, the wall and window background behind the girl merges with the painted sky background behind the woman as the viewer pans the piece from left to right.

The piece itself, entitled *Make Yourself*, intends to communicate the a/r/tography position that engagement in visual art practice is a lifelong affair, situated in the joy of process and the freedom of inquiry. It also asserts the complementary theory of unschooling, that one's inner compass should be allowed to intrinsically guide one's curriculum and that this choice is imperative in identifying and fulfilling one's personal

standard of excellence. The work exists to communicate these concepts visually, as well as to catalyze further thought and dialogue thereof.

I find resonance with words from the a/r/tography website: “Meaning is not external to action but embedded and folded within self and other, and objects and their arrangements are embodied, intercorporeal and folded with, in and through one another” (Relational Inquiry section, ¶ 6). This painting is me, through and through: my past, my present, my vision for the future; it signifies my thoughts, opinions, passions, beliefs: the whole of who I am as an individual. Finally, this painting has served me in facilitating the self-reflection that brought me to the point of solidifying the ideas I have presented here… all through the freedom of the artistic process.

Make Yourself
Oil on Canvas
24” x 36”
November 2008

CHAPTER FIVE: OVERALL CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Upon completion of my painting and the research built within it, I arrive at three main conclusions. First, that there is incredible value in reflection–for art teachers, making art is a truly educational way of doing this. Second, that making art deepens teaching practice and provides the occasion of spurring on dialogue. Third, that freedom is absolutely critical to effective teaching, learning, living, and being. These conclusions are described here in further detail.

Reflection as Investment in Oneself

In my life as an artist and a teacher, I see reflection and contemplation as natural imperatives to the subjectivity of my work. Though reflection can function at varying degrees, I believe that a deep level of introspection is necessary and fundamental to developing a clear concept of self. Whether it be making art or teaching students, life is in a state of constant flux from one day to the next; knowing oneself intimately and establishing oneself in philosophy allows a person to be confident in themselves and their future, no matter what happens. For me, it is painting that provides this opportunity to think, question, analyze, critique, and conclude by virtue of a mental transportation into "flow" (Csikszentmihalyi, 2004). Within this subconscious space, the possibilities for arriving at conclusions, decisions, and epiphanies are wide open. Irwin and de Cosson (2004) explain this phenomenological place within the a/r/tography methodology as "new territory, a borderland of reformation and transformation, a geographical, spiritual, social, pedagogical, psychological and physical site intersubjectively and intrasubjectively situated in and through dialogue" (p. 9). It is here that I discover who I am; it is by means of art making that I make myself.

Self-reflection in the form of painting is synonymous with conducting research–defined by *Webster's Dictionary* (2009) as a "diligent inquiry or examination" into the singular most relevant topic a person could focus on: oneself. Irwin and de Cosson (2004) describe the artist-teacher-researcher as relying naturally on the integration of these three roles to inform his or her practice. This would therefore justify the easy facilitation of research as self-reflection through art (a/r/tography). It also means that artist-teacher-researchers are invested in their research experience as they continually confront, define, negotiate, and reform the state of the reality in which they operate. It is a journey of evolvement and growth wherein the inevitable byproduct of such close interactive engagement is subject expertise-the subjects being art, teaching, and ultimately oneself.

In comparison with current, more traditional modes of learning (e.g. participating in workshops, reading books on leadership, etc.), art making provides the artist-teacher-researcher with a self-determined personal curriculum. Unlike other models with one-size-fits-all methods, self-reflection through art honours the learner's time and interest; every moment of each "session" is truly valuable and constitutes active developmental progress. As Irwin and de Cosson (2004) state, "[art practice] is about each of us living a life of deep meaning through perceptual practices that reveal what was once hidden, create what has never been known, and imagine what we hope to achieve" (p. 10).

Furthermore, Eisner (2003) identifies a critical difference between training and education. The workshop approach to learning basically has only a lesson plan demonstration to offer, to be taken back the classroom. It can be effective to some degree in that it offers a new idea from an alternative perspective and it is ready to implement

however applying the methods belonging to somebody else is not comparable to one's own investigation for one's own unique purpose. Education on the other hand implies a leadership requirement and carries with it the ethical responsibility to keep in active pursuit of knowledge. Artist-teachers owe it to themselves and their students to take time to consider their practice in a comfortable environment and to nurture their inner artist. Meaning is not made in the context of recycling lesson plans for student work. It is evermore imperative for art teachers to allow time for reflection, given that the subject's standards of excellence are so subjective and the breadth and depth of the subject so vast. In my experience, the more familiar I become with educational theory such as a/r/tography and the unschooling philosophy, and the better acquainted I become with who I am as an artist and teacher in relation to these theories, the better prepared I am to function within (or without) them.

Painting is the means by which I conduct research so as to solidify my beliefs; I grow as an artist as I grow into myself. As my roles of artist-researcher-teacher inform one another, they grow together in tandem; I multitask by default, getting three for the price of one. In a study on the perceptions of preservice student art teachers, Adams (2003) notices this same phenomenon. He reports that students naturally integrated education concepts into their artwork at their graduate art exhibition as a means of coming to a greater understanding of themselves as artist-teachers. The visual evidence of their work spoke to their own evolved philosophies and methodologies as a coproduct of their evident growth in creative practice.

The purpose of self-reflection is to engage in thought deep enough to allow for understandings to surface that would not be able to otherwise. It operates as a journey

with outcomes that are not defined at the outset as the point of destination, just as Eisner (2003) advocates. Though understanding will ultimately arise, *specific* understanding itself is not the goal but a fortunate byproduct of this active process. In fact, any understandings resulting from self-reflection will remain unknown until the process is complete. For example, in the process of painting *Make Yourself*, my objective was to utilize the act of painting as a processor for my thoughts. I theorized that spending time in self-reflective analysis would likely lead to some powerful personal answers, but of what I would not know until I had spent enough time in mode. Emphasizing process over product as such allowed me the freedom of discovery, being open to whatever questions, possibilities, curiosities, and conclusions that may have arisen.

For me, it is the kinesthetic fluid quality of painting that creates the conditions for self-reflection. The repetitive motions of a brush weighted with paint are conducive to accessing the insightfulness of a state of mind that I can only describe as being somewhere between the unawareness of the conscious and the unawareness of the subconscious. Csikszentmihalyi (2004) reports on precisely this phenomenon in his research into creativity. In discussion of his findings after interviewing artists, he states:

> When you are really involved in this completely engaging process of creating something, as this man [is], he doesn't have enough attention left over to monitor how his body feels, or his problem at home; he can't feel that he's hungry or tired; his body disappears. His identity disappears from his consciousness because he doesn't have enough attention – none of us do - to really do something well that requires a lot of concentration and at the same to feel that he exists; so existence is temporarily suspended.

Wolf (2008) asserts that the learning that comes from this type of situation is driven by motivation to unveil the hidden mystery–in this case, the artwork, the idea, the part of oneself that hasn't yet been discovered. The learner is rewarded with surprise, meaningful knowledge, and an experiential set of personal conclusions. A well-crafted, solid understanding is made possible only by traveling down this path step-by-step with an abandonment of all expectation.

Thinking at a level of depth necessary to becoming truly reflective and self-analytic is not natural, given the lack of respect for thinking in our culture. Whether at school, at home, in social settings, during childhood, or in the adult world, the act of thinking is rarely socially constructed as a pleasant, voluntary action. Of course thinking happens continually in the subconscious on an involuntary level, but when it comes to thinking as some kind of requirement or on demand, it is often understood in the conscious in a negative sense. I believe the school system is largely to blame for this. Freire (1990) asserts that the current approach to teaching, whereby students are fed information like passive receptacles, oppresses them by diminishing and denigrating their ability to think for themselves. Gatto (1992) describes this "intellectual dependency" (p. 8) as a hidden agenda of the school system. He criticizes: "Good students wait for a teacher to tell them what to do. It is the most important lesson, that we must wait for other people, better trained than ourselves, to make the meanings of our lives" (p. 8). This inability to think consciously for oneself transcends the classroom into other areas of life and stages of life. It is widely prevalent and socially acceptable for adult learning to plateau and for adults to engage in activities that do not require active thought. It is a sad state of affairs when human thought–the essence of being–is belittled so badly.

Thinking for oneself, learning, and reflecting are foundational fuels for living a meaningful existence. Holt (1969) advocates for learning all the time, not just in the context of the classroom and not just in the context of youth. Art practice presents a genuine framework for ongoing learning; a/r/tography posits that the study of art is self-renewing and continual in nature (Irwin & de Cosson, 2004). While a particular piece may wrap up for the artist, the practice itself intentionally remains a constant reality. This also supports self-reflection as a necessary ongoing initiative since each is really inextricable of the other. The completion of my painting, *Make Yourself,* is not a completion in the sense of finale; rather it rests at what I was thinking about then and what I know now. Its completion is contextual to a point along my journey, while my study is ongoing and rebirthed with each new occasion for painting.

Role Modeling and Dialogue

Self-critique, as opposed to external assessment from another party (e.g., a teacher), is the most natural, appropriate, and effective method for evaluation in visual art. It is crucial to improvement and developing opinion and decisiveness in a field governed only by the laws of personal taste. Modeling my own artwork and discussing my own self-reflection process with my students has helped me demonstrate how valuable these activities can be and why. Talking about the process, the challenges and surprises that were presented, and my thoughts along the way helps to disillusion my students to the difficulty a finished piece may seem to represent and to my ability as anything extraordinary.

As the art teacher, I am the most appropriate person to role model an artistic education to my students. Actions almost always speak louder than words; I can explain

to students why art is important and how it can serve other areas of their life, I can talk about how art can be a vehicle to learning other things, but unless I follow my own advice, the meaning of what I say is severely diminished. I can advocate for creativity with words, but it is an entirely different conversation if I have my artwork behind me to reference. In my experience, they are eager to see what I have accomplished and where sustained practice may take them. I find my paintings win me their respect; my work is a new point of conversation between them and a chance to build rapport. Moreover, exhibiting my work to students sends the silent message that learning is for life.

Showing students my work can also act as a catalyst for their own thoughts, reflections, and artistic inspirations. *Make Yourself,* as with all visual representations, carries a communicative force of its own while simultaneously eliciting and inviting dialogue. Everyone, regardless of how adept their visual literacy skills are, will read a work of art and form their own interpretation as they search for meaning. In this case, the painting exists as a single image yet is symbolic of an entire philosophy, involving a/r/tography and unschooling, that I now embrace as my own. As with art itself, a/r/tography and Freire (1990) advocate for the dialogue process as a perpetual continuum in which ideas and thinking are ever evolving and shared for mutual benefit. I have watched over the years as students approach work such as this and attempt to pull meaning from it. It often leads to a question about what the piece means or what I was thinking about while I was making it. It gives me the opportunity to discuss the process I underwent, to highlight the importance of that process as opposed to the outcome, and to encourage them to find their own individualized meaning in it. In other words, my artwork serves as a catalyst for the self-reflection of others, not just myself. Inviting

students into my realm of creativity offers them a platform for their thoughts, thus opening the door to deepening their own creativity.

Freedom

After assessing the issue, reading the literature, following the methodology and spending time in reflection, ultimately what my research boils down to is the freedom factor. Every living thing operates, performs, and behaves at a fullness when freedom is a condition of its existence. Attempting to oppress, control, dictate, and/or impose upon one's ability to choose for oneself what is best is dehumanizing; it is counterproductive and inevitably leads to less than optimal effectiveness in a person. By this observation, it would seem that freedom–of what and how we think, learn and spend our time–ought to be an entitlement to every human being by birthright; it is for adults–people who at one point "did their time" thinking and learning under the jurisdiction of others. Our children however continue to be condemned to a limiting educational experience that evokes the very symptoms I expressed concern over at the outset of this study–apathy, avoidance, conformity, nonoriginality, inhibition, mediocrity, and fear, among others. Holt (1989) writes, "Real learning is a process of discovery, and if we want it to happen, we must create the kinds of conditions in which discoveries are made. We know what these are. They include time, leisure, freedom and lack of pressure" (p. 100). As is, their inability to advocate and articulate on behalf of their plight and their inexperience to know otherwise renders them a silent target against an overwhelming force that insists this is all for their own good.

It seemed art became a legitimate preoccupation in my life in the eyes of others only after years of fighting within the school system for what I knew was right for me,

challenging curricular requirements and protesting against “professional” advice. While the opinions of others thankfully did not merit enough of an impact to sway me in my passion, I find it interesting that only as of late have my arguments regarding art education found a place of resonance. Since then, the arguments themselves have not changed, nor have I, save for the 5 to 10 years I now have behind me that somehow serve as social credential. The fact is, I knew then what compelled me, what stirred within me, and what I wanted for my life. In the words of Dr. Carlo Ricci (2006), “How old do children have to be before they can begin unschooling? The answer to this question is simple: Now. As soon as you are fortunate enough to discover this alternative way of life, it is the right time” (p. 11). Over the course of this study, I have demonstrated how personal choice and the element of genuine piqued interest have empowered a research project that I at one point did not think would be mine. Now I understand as a result of this research that, without a doubt, my students know better than I about what is best for them as individuals… and that as my truth has set us both free.

References

Adams, J. (2003). The artist-teacher scheme as postgraduate professional development in higher education. *JADE, 22*(2), 183-194.

Adams, J. (2007). Artists becoming teachers: Expressions of identity tranformation in a virtual forum. *JADE, 26*(3), 264-273.

Alexandra Nechita. (n.d.). Retrieved November 19, 2008, from Wikipedia Free Encyclopedia Website: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alexandra_Nechita

A/r/tography. (2005). Retrieved April 6, 2009, from http://m1.cust.educ.ubc.ca/Artography/

Cameron, J. (2002). *The artist's way*. New York: Penguin Putnam.

Connelly, F. M., & Clandinen, D. J. (1988). *Teachers as curriculum planners: Narratives of experience.* Toronto, ON: OISE Press.

Craig Kielburger. (n.d.). Retrieved November 19, 2008, from Wikipedia Free Encyclopedia Website: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Craig_Kielburger

Crum, J. E. (2007 July). Educating the art teacher: Investigating artistic endeavors by students at home. *Art Education,* 39–44.

Csikszentmihaly, M. (2004**).** *Creativity, fulfillment and flow.* Retrieved January 21, 2009, from http://www.ted.com/index.php/talks/mihaly_csikszentmihalyi_on_flow.html

Dewey, J. (1984). The social significance of academic freedom. *Education Digest, 50*(1), 37-39.

Edwards, B. (1999). *The new drawing on the right side of the brain*. New York: Penguin.

Eisner, E. W. (1984). Can educational research inform educational practice? *Phi Delta Kappan, 65*(7), 447-452.

Eisner, E. W. (2002). From episteme to phronesis to artistry in the study and improvement of teaching. *Teaching and Teacher Education, 18*, 375-385.

Eisner, E. W. (2003). Artistry in education. *Scandinavian Journal of Educational Research, 47*(3), 373-384.

Elkins, J. (2001). *Why art cannot be taught*. Chicago: University of Illinois Press.

Epstein, R. (2007). *The case against adolescence.* Sanger, CA: Quill Driver Books.

Freed, J. M. A. T., & Parsons, L. (1997). *Right-brained children in a left-brained world*. New York: Simon and Schuster.

Freire, P. (1990). *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. New York: Continuum.

Fried, R. L. (2005). *The game of school.* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Gatto, J. T. (1992). *Dumbing us down: The hidden curriculum of compulsory schooling*. Philadelphia: New Society.

Godin, S. (2009). *Curiosity.* Retrieved April 8, 2009, from http://vimeo.com/2873717

Griffith, M. (1998). *The unschooling handbook.* Rocklin, CA: Prima.

Guskey, T. R. (2002). *How's my kid doing? A parent's guide to grades, marks and report cards.* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Holt, J. (1969). *How children learn*. New York: Dell.

Holt, J. (1982). *How children fail*. New York: Dell.

Holt, J. (1989). *Learning all the time*. Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley.

Irwin, R. (2005). *A/r/tography.* Retrieved April 6, 2009, from http://m1.cust.educ.ubc.ca/Artography/

Irwin, R., & de Cosson, A. (2004). *A/R/Tography: Rendering self through arts based living inquiry*. Vancouver, BC: Pacific Education Press.

Kind, S., de Cosson, A., Irwin, R. L., & Grauer, K. (2007). Artist-teacher partnerships in learning: The in/between spaces of artist-teacher professional development. *Canadian Journal of Education, 30*(3), 839-864.

Leggo, C. (2007). Tangled lines: The art of researching our lives. *Journal of Educational Thought, 41*(2), 191-199.

Ricci, C. (2006. May/June). Always learning. *Life Learning: Homeschooling, Self-Directed Learning, Distance Education,* 11-17.

Robinson, K. (2008, September 10). *Riz Khan - Schools killing creativity?* Retrieved April 7, 2009, from http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YAt-3Yk2u80

Robinson, K. (2006). *Do schools kill creativity?* Retrieved December 27, 2008, from http://www.ted.com/index.php/talks/ken_robinson_says_schools_kill_creativity.html

Robinson, K., & Aronica, L. (2009). *The element: How finding your passion changes everything*. New York: Viking.

McNiff, S. (1998). *Trust the process : An artist's guide to letting go*. Boston: Shambhala.

Ministry of Education and Training. (1998). *The Ontario curriculum grades 1-8: The arts*. Ottawa: Queen's Printer for Ontario.

Schwartz, F. R. (1975). Graudate education in the fine arts for the artist-teacher. *Peabody Journal of Education, 52*(3), 205-212.

Sidney Crosby. (n.d.). Retrieved November 19, 2008, from Wikipedia Free Encyclopedia Website: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sidney_Crosby

Sinner, A., Leggo, C., Irwin, R. L., Gouzouasis, P., & Grauer, K. (2006). Arts-based educational research dissertations: Reviewing the practices of new scholars. *Canadian Journal of Education, 29(*4), 1223-1270.

Stephens, J. (1995). Artist or teacher ? *International Journal of Music Education, 25(*1), 3-13.

Stewart, R. (1999). *Theorizing praxis : Processes for visual research.* Unpublished manuscript, University of Southern Queenslad, Australia.

Temmerman, N. (2006). Equipping future arts educators for primary schools of the 21st century: An Australian point of view. *International Journal of Music Education, 24*(3), 271-282.

Thornton, A. (2005). The artist teacher as reflective practitioner. *JADE, 24*(2), 166-174.

Upitis, R. (2005). Experiences of artists and artist-teachers involved in teacher professional development programs. *International Journal of Education & the Arts, 6*(8), 1-11.

Upitis, R., Smithrim, K., & Soren, B. J. (1999). When teachers become musicians and artists: Teacher transformation and professional development. *Music Education Research, 1*(1), 23-35.

Watrin, R. (1999). Art as research. *Canadian Review of Art Education, 26*(2), 92- 100.

Webster's dictionary. (2009). Research. Retrieved February 4, 2009, from http://www.webster-dictionary.net/d.aspx?w=research

Wolf, S. A. (2008). The mysteries of creative partnerships. *Journal of Teacher Education, 59*(1), 89-102.