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Making Our Marks: An Autoethnographic Exploration of Teaching Art as a Relational Process

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MAKING OUR MARKS: AN AUTOETHNOGRAPHIC EXPLORATION OF TEACHING

ART AS A RELATIONAL PROCESS

by

STEPHANIE MARIE GILL

Under the Direction of Dr. Melody Milbrandt

ABSTRACT

This thesis is an autoethnographic investigation of interactions I have had with my students as a first-year art educator and the ways in which these interactions have led me to recall memories of my own experience as a student in art. Employing a metaphor of "teaching as mutual mark making," I present these interactions as "sketches," which refer to and reflect the ongoing and unfinished nature of memory and experience. My exploration of memory as it relates to teaching and learning has led me to advocate for art education based on relationships between teacher and student, as well as the relationship between the educator and his or her own learning experiences.

INDEX WORDS: Teacher-student relationships, Teacher identity, Novice art educators, Autoethnography

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STEPHANIE MARIE GILL

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

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1. INTRODUCTION

When I revisit and reconstruct my first year of teaching, what I will remember most is the connections I formed with my students and how these connections challenged me to confront my own experiences as a student, question who I am as a teacher, and negotiate my idea of the kind of teacher I want to become. In speaking with my students, I not only heard their voices, but I heard my own voice, as well as the voices of my own memories. This overlapping of memory and dialogue has become an integral part of my development as a teacher.

In my autoethnographic study, I wish to explore how my relationships with my students have influenced my identity as an educator and led me reflect on my own experiences in art education. I also wish to investigate how these realizations of our "shared reality" (Greene, 1978) have led me to consider (and sometimes reconsider) my stance on art education in order to foster a student-centered environment built on meaning, trust, and dialogue.

1.1. Background for the Study

During my first year of teaching, I was employed by a public elementary charter school in Atlanta, GA. As a first-year art teacher at a brand-new school, I was responsible for developing an art program with no curriculum and few materials. Teaching "art on a cart" also provided its own challenges, as I was forced to consider how to create a positive art environment without a classroom of my own.

While most preservice educators become familiar and comfortable with leading a class through their student teaching, I experienced the induction phase (Fry, 2007) of my teaching career without the guidance of a supervising teacher. I had not completed student teaching, and instead my full-time job also served as an internship necessary for completing my certification. In addition to being a first-year teacher, I was also a full-time student in a master's program for

art education.

In the beginning of the school year, I struggled to manage my time between what I called "work-school" and "school-school," while developing lessons and trying out new classroom management tricks. On top of my schoolwork, I spent hours doing research online, trying to find quick lessons that would get me through another week. I watched videos of "master teachers" who were able to get their students quiet and still within seconds. I noticed a discrepancy between what I had learned in my graduate art education courses and what was marketed as good teaching. Furthermore, the research that I was doing for my thesis was *about* novice teaching and the challenges faced by new teachers. Although I knew it was common for novices to "compartmentalize their knowledge" (Kowalchuk, 1999), I didn't want to be common. How could I teach in a way that was meaningful, while juggling my separate responsibilities?

As the year progressed, I became aware of how my conversations with my students caused me to feel a sense of similarity with them. As they expressed their frustrations, curiosities, and challenges, I was reminded of my own childhood and adult experiences as an art student. Slowly, the teacher and student sides of myself became less at odds with one another, and I saw them as inextricably linked. Throughout the year, I became more interested in creating a student-centered learning environment that accepted and encouraged this shifting of roles as the students and I learned from each other.

While my written reflections throughout my first year illustrated my challenges with classroom management, lesson planning, and integrating my graduate student and teacher selves, I have chosen to present my narratives in the context of what I find most meaningful as an educator: enhancing my relationships with my students and listening to their voices. In documenting my transformation as a first-year teacher through written reflections, notes, and

audio recordings, I have gained insight into my own patterns of thought that make it possible to reflect on what the process of "becoming" a teacher has meant for me.

1.2. Need for the Study

I wish to add my voice to the ever-growing collection of stories of educators (Vasconcelos, 2011) and art educators (Garnet, 2012) that explore the importance of teachers' prior educational experiences on their teaching practice. I would also like for my story to illustrate the ways in which the *process* of teaching can illuminate memories that have influenced a teacher's educational stance, and the ways in which the attention to these connections can encourage teachers to observe and reevaluate their values and relationships to students.

Scholars in education have made great contributions to research about the experiences of novice teachers (Fry, 2007, 2009; Snyder, 2012; Smeaton & Waters, 2013), as well as novice art teachers (Zimmerman, 1994; Kowalchuk, 1999b; Bain, Newton, Kuster, and Milbrandt 2010; Kuster, Bain, Newton, & Milbrandt, 2010; Muhlheim, 2010). While most of this research has focused on the summation of experiences of novice teachers (Zimmerman, 1994; Kowalchuk, 1999b; Bain, Newton, Kuster, and Milbrandt 2010; Kuster, Bain, Newton, & Milbrandt, 2010;), there is still a need for novice art teachers to provide first-person accounts of their experiences, as well as reflections on how they integrate their previous knowledge and educational experiences in the classroom.

1.3. Purpose of the study

I believe that research in education and art education should include diverse stories that add to the collected narrative of what it means to teach and what it means to learn. I offer my set of stories, as well as my reflections on these stories, as a method of communication with current and future teachers and learners.

Because "events in the past are always interpreted from our current position" (Ellis, 1999, p. 674), I use autoethnography as a way to understand and express my experiences. In this way, my stories become "both a means of knowing and a way of telling about the social world" (Bochner, 2012, p. 155). This act of "telling" is an important element in my autoethnographic exploration, just as dialogue has become an important part of teaching for me.

One of my favorite writers, Anne Lamott (1994), says:

> When you're conscious and writing from a place of insight and simplicity and real caring about the truth, you have the ability to throw the lights on for your reader. He or she will recognize his or her life and truth in what you say, in the pictures you have painted, and this decreases the terrible sense of isolation that we have all had too much of. (p. 225)

In sharing my personal experiences in the classroom and how they relate to this stage of my journey as a teacher and learner, I hope that the reader will "recognize his or her life" as it relates to mine. I am still, and will always be, "in the process *of becoming*—as [an] unfinished, uncompleted [being] in and with a likewise unfinished reality" (Freire, 2000, p. 84). I hope that my story will resonate with fellow educators who recognize the impact of their own histories on their teaching, who are also "becoming."

2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

2.1. Challenges of Novice Teachers: Theory vs. Practice

There are many possible factors that can potentially affect the success of novice teachers, including their personalities, the school environments in which they teach, the level of administrative support, and how the teachers themselves manage the stress and expectations of their jobs (Fry, 2007). While each teacher has a unique experience, there are common themes that emerge as challenges facing first-year educators in all disciplines, such as time management, communication with parents, and relating with colleagues and administrators. However, I have chosen to focus this section of my review of literature on the topics of classroom management and curriculum planning, as well as the difficulties many novice teachers have with putting theory into practice regarding these elements of teaching.

Current research points to a discrepancy in the experiences of student teachers and novice teachers, suggesting that preservice programs and student teaching may not fully prepare preservice teachers for their first years in the field. Smeaton and Waters (2010) found a discrepancy between the ways in which student teachers and novice teachers implement classroom management strategies. Their discussions with novice teachers revealed that the teaching strategies they had previously used during student teaching were ineffective for some students with academic and behavioral issues. Furthermore, novice teachers who have difficulties with a few students may experience a dwindling of confidence in their overall classroom management strengths (Fry, 2007).

Not only is there a difference in how preservice teachers and novice teachers apply classroom management techniques, but the ways in which preservice teachers articulate their definitions of effective classroom management also points to a gap between theory and practice.

Though many teacher preparation programs espouse constructivist and student-centered philosophies, preservice teachers may tend to envision classrooms that are more teacher-centered. Kaufman & Moss (2010) found that "[preservice teachers] support student creativity, education as a lifelong endeavor, and teacher flexibility in order to meet individual needs. However, when faced with the complexities of a real classroom—particularly its management—they often turn to methodologies that contradict their stated beliefs" (Kaufman & Moss, 2010). This finding implies a need for teacher preparation programs to offer students support in integrating student-centered practices into real-world situations.

Planning curriculum is arguably the largest concern of novice teachers. Smeaton and Waters (2010) point to contradictions between what preservice teachers consider to be important in terms of curricular content and what they, as novice teachers, actually teach. The novice teachers in their study did implement some research-based strategies that they had learned in the preservice education courses and utilized during their student teaching. However, there was a significant gap between the strategies they had learned in their university programs and what they demonstrated as teachers. Novice teachers taught lessons that only engaged lower order thinking skills, and the researchers did not observe the use of higher order inquiry. Although the novice teachers utilized more researched-based practices by the end of their first year, there was still a significant disconnect. Fry's (2007) found that novice teachers may find it difficult to start teaching without a repertoire of materials, and that while veteran teachers may find it liberating to have autonomy regarding their own curriculum, the task of developing curriculum content can be intimidating for first-year teachers who have limited knowledge and experience.

In addition to developing comprehensive curriculum, researchers suggest that teachers of all levels remain active in professional organizations and consistently look for ways to improve

their professional development. Professional learning can help teachers implement relevant and meaningful lessons that are in tune with developments in the discipline of education, and Wong & Wong (2009) assert that "the more a teacher learns, the more students will learn" (p. 299). They note that effective teachers are constantly looking for ways to improve, rather than making excuses for their shortcomings. When teachers are committed to their own personal and professional development, they will work diligently to help their students achieve success.

2.1.1. Novice Art Teachers

Researchers have expressed an interest in articulating the process of how students of education actually become teachers (Fry, 2007; Kuster, O'Neal, & Gooch, 2010; Smeaton & Waters, 2010; Snyder, 2012), and in art education, there is a growing need for novice teacher voices to synthesize their experiences. Kowalchuk (1999b) investigated the self-perception of novice teachers through examining their reflections, but she also acknowledged a gap in research that could be filled with more first-hand accounts that examine a teacher's transformation during the first years of teaching.

Kowalchuk (1999a) found that novices often compartmentalize their knowledge; even current students and recent graduates may find it difficult to blend the theory learned in their education courses with their day-to-day teaching practice, a possible reason being that "their art understandings may be organized in discrete components similar to the structure of classes they have taken" (p. 82). Her study (1999b), comparing the pedagogical practices of an expert and novice art teacher, reveals differences in the way expert and novice teachers design and teach lessons. The novice teacher participant, for example, had taken the required number of art history classes to satisfy her art education degree, yet her art lesson revealed a superficial approach to art history, which Kowalchuk observes bordered on misinformation. Furthermore, the ways in

which the novice teacher related this knowledge to her students illustrated an unwillingness to delve into deeper concepts suitable for the students' developmental level. On the other hand, the expert teacher demonstrated a deep knowledge of art concepts and made interdisciplinary connections in her lesson.

Although there is some research that examines how novice art educators and student teachers design and implement their curriculum, the existing research echoes Smeaton and Waters' (2010) findings regarding the difference in presevice teachers' conceptions of effective curriculum and what they eventually teach in the classroom. For instance, Gude (2000) found that although her preservice teachers considered contemporary issues like controversial art, feminist art, and outsider/folk art to be important, they completely ignored these issues when devising curriculum topics for a secondary art course. Bain, Newton, Kuster, and Milbrandt (2010), who observed eleven novice art teachers, also noticed a discrepancy between what preservice teachers learned in their art education programs and what their instructional objectives were as first-year teachers. The study found that although the art education programs attended by these novice teachers focused on thematic and issues-based curriculum, "first-year teachers in this study were teaching at the lowest cognitive level" (Bain, Newton, Kuster, & Milbrandt, 2010, p. 242). Kowalchuk (1999a) also found that novice teachers may rely on published curricula as "expert" text instead of using prior knowledge to plan more thoughtful lessons.

Why is there such a marked difference between preservice teacher knowledge and novice teacher practice? Art education researchers have found that preservice and novice teachers' previous experiences as art students often influence their perceptions of teaching (Bullock & Galbraith, 1992; Kowalchuk, 1993; Henry, 1999; Gude, 2000). Henry (1999) states that "beliefs about teaching are often deeply rooted and remain intact despite what we try to teach in

education classes" (p. 16). Gude (2000) also noticed the tendency for preservice educators to "[visualize] the curriculum as a recycled version of their own public school art experiences" (p. 75).

Novice teachers themselves cite many challenges in creating and developing meaningful curriculum, including lack of time and counter-productive scheduling (Kuster, Bain, Newton, & Milbrandt, 2010). A novice teacher in Kuster, Bain, Newton, & Milbrandt's (2010) study lamented "how difficult and time consuming it was to plan meaningful lessons…some days she simply addressed, 'What am I going to do with second grade?'" (Kuster, Bain, Newton, and Milbrandt, 2010). Likewise, a novice teacher participant in Smeaton and Water's (2010) study commented on how long it took to develop constructivist lessons for her students. Novice teachers who lack assistance and resources may implement a "trial and error" approach to curriculum planning and tend to focus on creating simplistic lessons instead of developing comprehensive units (Fry, 2007).

2.2. Teachers as Researchers

Teachers who engage in the observation, inquiry, and reflection that are necessary for research can improve their curricula and incorporate best practices into their classrooms. However, the concept of research may be unfamiliar to some teachers who view it as "something that is done to or for teachers to inform classroom practice, not by or with their participation" (DeCorse, 1997, p. 5). Teachers may also have different views of what research entails; while some see research as part of an integrated approach to teaching, others see it as separate from, and in addition to, the day-to-day responsibilities of their jobs. Kennedy-Lewis (2012) also observes that there is a shift of roles that occurs when educators engage in research:

"Renegotiating one's role as researcher from that as teacher requires a rebalancing of values and priorities that can make the research act difficult" (p. 109).

Novice teachers and expert teachers consider the notion of teacher-researcher in various ways, according to their levels of experience (DeCorse, 1997). Even educators who consider themselves researchers may have difficulties in articulating exactly what the research process entails. Novice teachers typically understand research as a sterile and "book-oriented" (DeCorse, 1997), while veteran teachers associate research with day-to-day inquiry and finding solutions to problems that they encounter in the classroom.

There is also a difference in the ways novice teachers and expert teachers approach and engage in research practices. DeCorse found that both expert and novice teachers initially felt anxiety when thinking of themselves as researchers or considering the role research might play in their teaching practice. However, while novice teachers experienced difficulties in thinking of potential research questions, expert teachers felt more comfortable in exploring the links between teaching and research inquiry.

Reflection can be especially helpful for novice teachers who want to improve their teaching practice. Engaging in self-reflection allows novice teachers to record their successes and failures, and in analyzing these records, teachers may learn more about themselves and their students (Henry, 1998; Delacruz, 2000). Novice teachers should reflect on unusual occurrences as well as routine activities (Kowalchuk, 1999b). Bodenhamer (1997) also notes that engaging in reflective practice can help educators cultivate compassion for their students. Teachers can develop self-awareness through the use of reflections, which can help them to improve relationships with students: when teachers develop "self-understanding," they become more

adept at noticing and responding to emotions in the moment that could potentially harm interactions with students, and instead may choose a better course of action (Guillaume, 2011).

2.3. Curriculum Development in Art Education

Curriculum development is one of the core components of being a successful teacher, as it is through curriculum that teachers communicate to their students what they believe is most essential to learn. In deciding on curriculum content, teachers make their educational values clear to students. Furthermore, as Eisner (1979) argues, the act of teaching involves much more than choosing and implementing lessons and assessments of student learning. He argues that schools teach three curricula, all of which impact student learning both directly and indirectly. The explicit curriculum is composed of deliberately chosen lessons and topics that are taught through instruction. Implicit curriculum, on the other hand, is taught through more subtle means, such as a teacher's organizational skills, pedagogical style, and interactions with students. Finally, a null curriculum is comprised of material that is not taught. As Eisner observes, what is excluded from a curriculum illustrates its importance (or lack thereof) in the eyes of the educator. Agreeing with Eisner, Guillaume (2011) succinctly states that "every action that a teacher takes—or does not take—can teach"(p.26). In art education, teachers have a responsibility to develop curriculum content that is comprehensive and inclusive. Pennisi (2013) also asserts that the art educator's choices in curriculum content will determine how students define their notions of what art is (and is not).

Just as there is no such thing as a neutral curriculum, "there is no neutral philosophy" (Guillaume, 2011, p.30). A teacher's curriculum will ultimately be informed by his or her stance on education, and Guillaume (2011) suggests that teachers treat their educational stance as "a compass for decision making" (p.23). Guillaume suggests that teachers articulate their

educational stance early on; this stance should be evident in their instruction and interaction with students. Teachers should also learn how to identify the stances of others in order to find common ground, and must also be open to revising their views as needed to provide better learning opportunities for students.

Art curriculum not only reflects the values of the art educator, but it also demonstrates his or her knowledge of developments and trends in the profession. Popovich (2006) asserts that "a comprehensive and effective art curriculum is grounded and supported by current research in the field" (p. 35). Teachers should be aware of best practices in art education and make efforts to formulate meaningful art experiences for their students.

On the other hand, it is common for art teachers to exhaust themselves in their attempt to create curricula that reflects new developments in the field (Mims & Lankford, 1994; Delacruz, 2000). Mims and Lankford (1994) acknowledge the anxiety that teachers experience as they attempt to modify their art programs to accommodate new trends in art education. They examine the myth of the Superarteducator, which "deludes art teachers into believing that they can and should incorporate every new platform, idea, and trend in art education into their existing programs" (p. 58). This pressure causes teachers to become frustrated, overwhelmed, and insecure about the strength of their art programs. Even the most accomplished educators experience consistent frustration as a result of trying to accommodate numerous educational stances.

Rather than becoming overwhelmed by the self-imposed stress of trying "do it all," art educators should strive to balance their interest in professional development with establishing realistic and attainable goals. Mims and Lankford (1994) urge art educators to be selective when choosing their educational and aesthetic stances: "The fact is, we can be munificent in what we

care about, but we must be choosy in what we commit ourselves to. Commitment demands action. No one can be up on everything and in on everything" (Mims & Lankford, 1994, p. 58). Educators should be flexible and open to revising their stances as needed, and making incremental adjustments to their art programs each year will help teachers feel a sense of accomplishment and stay motivated.

2.4. Teacher-Student Relationships

Teacher-student relationships are among the primary concerns of educators. In a 2012 study involving 42 elementary and secondary preservice teachers, "the majority of respondents' fears and concerns…were grounded in student–teacher relationships" (Kaufman & Moss, p. 126). However, Nichols & Zhang (2011) report that "elementary teachers appear to report a greater desire [than secondary teachers] to provide students with an empowering atmosphere based on less teacher control of learning and the development of greater opportunities for positive relationships" (p. 237).

The ability of students to have closer and less conflicted relationships with their teachers varies according to their respective personalities (Zee, Koomen, & Van der Veen, 2013), but there are profound benefits related to close teacher-student relationships. Positive relationships between teachers and students "may provide students with internalized resources that enable them to regulate their own academic behavior, and to develop positive beliefs and attitudes about the self as learner" (Zee, Koomen, & Van der Veen, 2013, p. 518). Conversely, Nichols & Zhang (2011) assert that "negative relationships can result in negative student feelings of self-worth and poor self-efficacy" (Nichols & Zhang, 2011).

Teachers themselves are also affected both positively and negatively by their relationships with students, as "only incidents that are judged relevant to one's goals, values, or

needs trigger emotions" (Spilt, Koomen, & Thijs, 2011, p. 459). Spilt, Koomen, and Thijs (2011) state that "positive teacher–child relationships may indirectly influence teachers' feelings of effectiveness, competence, and agency"(p. 466).) Not only are teachers affected by their relationships with their students, but even *individual* teacher-student relationships have the capacity to affect a teacher's self-esteem (Spilt, Koomen, & Thijs, 2011). This echoes the findings of Fry (2007), whose novice teacher participant experienced lower self-efficacy as a result of negative relationships with a few students.

There appears to be a significant difference between preservice and novice teachers' self-efficacies in relation to fostering positive relationships with students. Nichols, Agness, and Smith (2005) found that while preservice and novice teachers expressed a desire to develop a classroom environment based on student empowerment and positive relationships, "early career teacher responses suggested their need to exhibit control of the classroom and to provide limited empowerment to students" (p. 252). Furthermore, "comparisons of preservice and veteran teacher beliefs and veteran and first-year teacher beliefs differ in terms of the amount of 'control' that teachers feel that they need in the classroom" (Nichols & Zhang, 2011, p. 236). This suggests that as teachers become more confident and comfortable in their roles, they become less concerned with showing traditional forms of "power" or "control."

Research suggests that preservice education programs may significantly affect a novice teacher's capacity to cultivate positive student-centered classroom environments. Nichols, Agness, and Smith (2005) observe that "university methods courses often encourage pre-service teachers to maintain control of student behavior, the curriculum, and in effect learning, in order that they are not observed to be out of control in a chaotic classroom" (p. 252). Conversely, Fry's (2009) study of successful novice teachers illustrates the positive effects of teacher preparation

programs, as well as support from fellow teachers, in helping novice teachers establish positive classroom environments. Though the novice teacher participants had articulated an interest in student-centered education, "they learned *how* to achieve this vision because their teacher education program and cooperating teachers emphasized student centered learning, inquiry, and community" (Fry, 2009, p. 107).

2.4.1. Caring Teacher-Student Relationships

Care is an important element in meaningful teacher-student relationships, and some would argue the most important. While caring relationships between teachers and students may develop in myriad ways, Nel Noddings (2005) views caring as "a way of being in relation, not a set of specific behaviors" (p. 17).

Like Freire (2000, 1998), Noddings (2012) believes that "dialogue is fundamental in building relations of care and trust" (p. 775). Maxine Greene (2001) agrees, asserting that "partnerships must exist as face-to-face relationships and the kind of dialogue such relationships make possible" (p. 164). Because these partnerships and caring relationships occur between two individuals, it is important for teachers to consider their relationships with students individually, as well as collectively. Spilt, Koomen, & Thijs (2011) observed that teachers have a tendency to develop "relationship-specific models for individual children in their class" (p. 464), and Noddings (2012) acknowledges that caring relationships are not necessarily equal. Thus, as Phillips (2014) proposes, caring becomes "a lesson in differentiation" (p. 5).

In order for caring relationships to develop, teachers must illustrate an *attitude* of care. Freire (1998) asks, "How can I be an educator if I do not develop in myself a caring and loving attitude toward the student, which is indispensable on the part of one who is committed to teaching and to the education process itself?" (1998a, p. 65). Noddings echoes this sentiment in

her statement that care "is not 'on top' of other things, it is underneath all we do as teachers." (2012, p. 777). Thus, care is not an additional benefit of education, but a prerequisite *for* education: "If I do not love the world—if I do not love life—if I do not love people—I cannot enter into dialogue" (Freire, 2000, p. 90). This suggests that love and care must be present in order for learning to occur.

Care is also described as *attention* as well as an attitude. Noddings (2012) states that "a carer is first of all attentive, and watches and listens" (p. 773). Dewey (1997) believed it was essential "for the teacher to be intelligently aware of the capacities, needs, and past experiences of those under instruction" (p. 71). This involves a consistent attention toward one's students and their experiences in order to help facilitate new experiences through which they may learn. This awareness and attention must be free from judgment: "From this perspective, it is important not to confuse what the cared-for wants with that which we think he should want. We must listen, not just 'tell', assuming that we know what the other needs" (Noddings, 2012, p. 773). Maxine Greene (1978) also discusses the notion of attentiveness to oneself (what she calls "wide-awakeness") as a prerequisite to cultivating meaningful relationships with students:

> I am convinced that, if teachers today are to initiate young people into an ethical existence, they themselves must attend more fully than they normally have to their own lives and its requirements; they have to break with the mechanical life, to overcome their own submergence in the habitual, even in what they conceive to be the virtuous, and ask the "why" with which learning and moral reasoning begin (p. 46)

Thus, caring relationships may only develop when teachers first acknowledge their own needs and experiences. This attention enables and empowers educators to engage with their students in more meaningful ways.

2.4.2. Dialogue and Inquiry in Teacher- Student Relationships

The notions of power and control mentioned in section 2.4 are central to Paulo Freire's banking concept of education (2000), which establishes a clear hierarchy between the teacher and student. Under this model, the teacher's responsibility "is to 'fill' the students with the contents of his narration— contents which are detached from reality, disconnected from the totality that engendered them and could give them significance" (Freire, 2000, p. 71). A teacher's relationship with students is one of control, "turn[ing] them into 'containers,' into 'receptacles' to be 'filled' by the teacher" (Freire, 2000, p. 72). John Dewey similarly (1999) denounced the notion of "learning by passive absorption" (1999, p. 38).

To move away from this hierarchical model of education, Freire advocates instead for a dialogical model:

> Through dialogue, the teacher-of-the-students and the students-of-the-teacher cease to exist and a new term emerges: teacher-student with students-teachers. The teacher is no longer merely the-one-who-teaches, but one who is himself taught in dialogue with the students, who in turn while being taught also teach. (p. 80)

The dialogue Freire describes occurs so that the teacher and student may explore and come to understand their sameness: they are both learners and teachers in relation to one another, and teachers "must be partners of the students in their relations with them" (Freire, 2000, p. 75). Thus, both teaching and learning can only exist in a relational context: "Authentic thinking, thinking that is concerned about *reality,* does not take place in ivory tower isolation, but only in communication" (Freire, 2000, p. 77). John Dewey also describes a relationship-dependent model of education based on inquiry, in which "the educator is responsible for a knowledge of individuals and for a knowledge of subject-matter that will enable activity ties to be selected

which lend themselves to social organization" (1997, p. 56).

Teacher-student relationships as described by Freire (2000) are not simply positive, affectionate, or respectful; rather, through dialogue, they call both teacher and student into action: "From the outset, her efforts must coincide with those of the students to engage in critical thinking and the quest for mutual humanization" (p. 75). As a result, teachers and students may "develop their power to perceive critically *the way they exist* in the world *with which* and *in which* they find themselves; they come to see the world not as a static reality, but as a reality in process, in transformation" (Freire, 2000, p. 83).

2.4.3. Teacher-Student Relationships in Art Education

In the art classroom, teacher-student relationships have the potential to not only bolster student confidence and self-efficacy, but they can also enhance the environment of creativity and inquiry. Reflecting Freire's (2000) notions of critical thinking and problem-posing education, Greene (1999) describes teacher-student relationships based on imagination:

> I am trying to awaken young persons and their teachers to loving the questions, to wondering, to refusing the crusts of convention, to an awareness of what is not yet. And always it is an effort to open new spaces in consciousness, to break with confinement in square rooms. (p. 7)

Personal relationships that are fostered in the art classroom may aid teachers and students in "opening these new spaces," and Pellish (2012) argues: "When personal connections are made in the classroom, it becomes a natural way to process the events of one's life, a thinking tool toward the budding of self-perception" (p. 19). These personal connections between teachers and their students also enhance the environment of creativity and inquiry in the art room, where a

"collaborative community of practice" (Page, 2012) occurs as teachers work with and alongside their students.

Not only are creative endeavors supported by positive teacher-student relationships, but recent quantitative research suggests that they may actually depend on them. For example, in Beghetto's (2006) study of creative self-efficacy (the belief in one's potential to be creative), "reports of teachers providing feedback on their creativity (i.e., teachers telling them that they were creative) served as the strongest unique predictor of students' creative self-efficacy" (p. 451). The findings of Beghetto, Kaufman, & Baxter (2011) later revealed that in the subjects of math and science, creative self-efficacy in young students affected their creative performance. Furthermore, the young students underestimated their creative potential. These discoveries lead Pretz and McCollum (2014) to argue:

> If we want to encourage creativity, we must also try to raise self-perceptions of creative ability. Individuals who distrust their ability to be creative will not only behave in a less creative manner, but will shy away from opportunities to exercise their creative capacity. (p. 234)

These findings regarding students' creative self-efficacies support the concept that "creativity is not something that 'just happens,' but rather needs constant cultivation" (Veon, 2014, p. 22).

When teachers and students "share similar purposes, desires and commitments to the production of creative outcomes" (Thomas, 2010, p. 141), students become "critical co-investigators in dialogue with the teacher" (Freire, 2000, p. 81). Art educators, therefore, may have a unique opportunity and responsibility to engage in dialogue with their students, "provok[ing] each one to wonder, to probe, to discern connections, to reach deeper, to seek out

more and more" (Greene, 1999, p. 8). This dialogue not only fosters creativity, but helps to build

relationships based on trust and collaboration.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. Autoethnography as Arts-Based Research

My investigation relies on an autoethnographic approach that employs an autobiographical narrative structure. Blending autobiography and ethnography, autoethnography is included in the realm of arts-based research, which "exploits the capacities of expressive form to capture qualities of life that impact what we know and how we live" (Barone & Eisner, p. 5). While ethnography is centered on the premise of researcher as "other," autoethnographers incorporate themselves into the research and analyze themselves as subjects as well as researchers (Ellis, 1999; Sparkes, 2011; Bochner, 2012). In other words, they "[turn] an ethnographic eye on themselves and their own lived experiences" (Bochner, 2012, p. 156). Thus, experiences in and of themselves are considered data, as well as the ways in which they are documented.

The narrative structure employed by autoethnography is varied but often tangential; in recounting a wide range of memories, emotions, questions, and perceptions, autoethnographers may "zoom backward and forward, inward and outward," revealing "multiple layers of consciousness" (Ellis, 1999, p. 673). These woven narratives, divergent and non-linear, combine as the researcher seeks to retell and make sense of his or her own lived experiences. Bochner (2012) reasons,

> If we experience our lives as stories, then why not represent them as stories? Why shouldn't social scientists represent life as temporally unfolding narratives and researchers as a vital part of the action? Shouldn't there be a closer connection between our research texts and the lives they represent? (p. 157)

While there has been an effort to include more forms of narrative inquiry in research over the

past few decades (Bochner, 2012), some critics (Atkinson, 1997; Coffey, 1999) question the viability of autoethnography . Sparkes (2011), however, denounces the criticism of autoethnography as a self-indulgent venture that seeks to "sociologize" one's lived experiences (p. 212). In fact, Ellis' (1999) examination of what she refers to as he*art*ful autoethnography reveals a challenging endeavor which requires its writer to be vulnerable, observant, and self-critical:

> The self-questioning autoethnography demands is extremely difficult. So is confronting things about yourself that are less than flattering. Believe me, honest autoethnographic exploration generates a lot of fears and self-doubts—and emotional pain. Just when you think you can't stand the pain anymore, well that's when the real work has only begun. Then there's the vulnerability of revealing yourself, not being able to take back what you've written or having any control over how readers interpret it. It's hard not to feel your life is being critiqued as well as your work. It can be humiliating. (p. 672)

As autoethnographers assert, this self-reflective approach to research is no simple task. It forces the researcher to think critically about his or her own experiences, which may include stories that reveal their own personal shortcomings and struggles. While most researchers strive for an objective and authoritative voice in their writing (Bochner, 2012), autoethnographers pull back the layers of façade to reveal human stories that implore the reader for compassion and empathy.

While the validity of autoethnography and arts-based methods is often questioned, Ellis (1999) points out that "language is not transparent, and there's no single standard of truth. To me, validity means that our work seeks verisimilitude; it evokes in readers a feeling that the experience described is lifelike, believable, and possible" (Ellis, 1999, p. 674). As a practice, autoethnography adopts the postmodern viewpoint that there is no such thing as universal truth.

"What we seek," Barone and Eisner (2012) argue, "is not so much validity as it is credibility" (p.

5). Furthermore, Bochner (2012) asserts that "because the world can't speak for itself, all

attempts to represent the world involve transforming a speechless reality into a discursive form

that makes sense" (p. 157). In following this logic, one may think of *all* researchers as

storytellers who weave together facts and interpretations to create a cohesive narrative that

translates knowledge into language (Bochner, 2012).

As an arts-based research method, autoethnography is a relational practice that pursues

"expressive form in the service of understanding" (Barone & Eisner, 2012, p. 7). Blending the

objective and authoritative "father tongue" with the intimate and vulnerable "mother tongue"

(Bochner, 2012), autoethnography becomes a means of communication, rather than mere

information that is passively accepted by the reader (Ellis, 1999; Sparkes, 2011; Bochner, 2012).

Bochner (2012) argues:

> If our research is to mean something to our readers — to be acts of meaning — our
>
> writing needs to attract, awaken, and arouse them, inviting readers into conversation with
>
> the incidents, feelings, contingencies, contradictions, memories, and desires that our
>
> research stories depict" (p. 158).

The relationship between researcher and reader that autoethnography seeks to cultivate "fits with

the poststructuralist views that stress the interaction of the reader and the text as coproduction,

and reading as a performance (Sparkes, 2011, p. 220). This sense of dialogue and understanding

affect the researcher as well, and the process of writing itself can help autoethnographers better

understand themselves and the world in which they live (Ellis, 1999; Bochner, 2012).

3.2. Timeline and Data Collection

Because I wanted my autoethnography to focus on my experiences as a first-year teacher,

I collected a variety of data from the beginning of the school year (August 2013) to the end of the school year (May 2014). This data included written reflections, notes, curriculum webs, and audio recordings, and focused on a variety of themes (including classroom management, curriculum development, and balancing my roles as a teacher and graduate student/researcher). I have chosen to focus my autoethnographic investigation on my relationship with my students, not because I wish to exclude the previously mentioned topics from my analysis of my first-year experiences, but because I have found that the ways in which I relate to my students are central to what I consider to be effective classroom management and meaningful art curriculum, as well as the desire to put the student-centered theories I learned as a graduate student into practice as a teacher. Using my experiences and reflections as data, I wish to explore and analyze how my experiences speak to my respective and combined roles as a student, teacher, and researcher, as well as the interactions that have led me to question and negotiate my views on meaningful art education.

3.3. Research Questions

In analyzing and evaluating the data I collected from my first year of teaching, I sought to address the following questions:

Research Question 1:

To what extent have my experiences as an art student contributed to my development as a first-year art teacher?

Research Question 2:

In what ways have my interactions with students led me to think about my own experiences as a student and evaluate my stance on art education?

Research Question 3:

What can novice art educators do to promote positive relationships with students?

3.4. Limitations of the Study

This study is limited by my own personal experiences in teaching, the students represented, and the environment in which I teach. Because it is a reflection of my unique perspective as a first-year art educator, it is not meant to represent anyone's experience but my own. My thematic focus of teacher-student relationships also limits the focus of other topics that are of importance to novice educators, including classroom management, curriculum development, parent-teacher communication, and communication with colleagues and administration. As a result, my investigation does not seek to give a comprehensive view of my experience as a first-year art educator.

4. SKETCHES AND DISCUSSION

> *Today, I feel anxious. I am worried about deadlines coming up, and I am scared that I won't be able to meet the expectations I have set for myself. The past 2 months have been rewarding and exciting, but also really difficult. I feel pulled in so many directions, and I feel like I haven't been as good of a teacher, student, or friend as I could be. I don't take a lot of time for myself, and I feel guilty when I do.*
>
> *I know that these obstacles are self-constructed—I want to be teaching. I want to be a student. I feel like these are important roles for me to play, but I hope I'm not setting myself up for failure. I want to be good at everything I'm doing, or at least feel like I have given each of my responsibilities enough time and attention.*
>
> Journal Entry, October 12, 2013

> *A parent sent out an email last night. She is trying to start a school-wide book club and wants art and music to do projects that support this. I feel like every parent is trying to tell me how to do my job; I wish I even knew how to do my job.*
>
> Journal Entry, October 17, 2013

> *I yelled for the first time ever. Ms. Morris' class was so loud and obnoxious. One student covered his wood with glue and told me that his personal story was about a rainbow. He seemed like he just didn't care. After cleanup, I found out that someone had put glue all over one of the sharpies. I yelled, "This is unacceptable!" threw the sharpie in the trash, and walked out.*
>
> Journal Entry, October 17, 2013

When I look back on my first year of teaching, I see a rapid succession of images, of moments, each imbued with various forms of meaning. The beginning of the year is especially blurry. When I wrote the first journal entry above, I was at a state-wide art education conference. After taking time off work and securing a substitute, I had been excited to learn about new research and developments in the field. However, being surrounded by so many teachers, with all of their thoughtful presentations and ideas, I felt lost. I was stressed about "managing" my students' behaviors, planning lessons, and juggling the responsibilities of teaching full-time on top of being a full-time graduate student. I was constantly trying new classroom management tricks, spending hours looking online for quick and easy lessons, all while writing papers and

working on group projects for my art education classes. As a teacher, I felt like there were so

many different parts of my job that to keep track of and improve on. As a person, I felt torn; there were separate parts of myself that I had to constantly balance, yet they all needed more attention than I could give them. I had no idea how to do it all.

> *I had a talk with Elliott* in 3rd grade. He was hiding his artwork because he said his friends made fun of it, but I told him how awesome I thought it was (because it was) – he designed a mural about his family, and said that he wants it in his neighborhood because it shows love. He is the sweetest kid. I asked him if it would be ok if I talked to the boys at his table about not insulting people's art, but he said that he would give them another chance and tell them to apologize.*
>
> Journal Entry, October 18, 2013

The entry above was written less than a week after my art education conference, and just a day after my meltdown with a third grade class. It describes an interaction I had with a student who seemed to be uncomfortable during class. When I asked him to speak with me in the hall, I found out his friends had said some unkind words about his art. I saw how dejected he looked and I thought about how, even as an adult, I would get butterflies in my stomach before a critique in my studio class. In an effort to encourage him, I said, "Elliott, you're an awesome kid." I knew I probably should have told him that it was kind of him to give his friends a second chance, or that I appreciated that he trusted me enough to say something, but I couldn't help it. I felt the need, a sense of responsibility in that moment, to give Elliott the most caring comment I could muster. After we talked, I could sense that Elliott felt better, and I know that I did. Even after my week of second-guessing myself, doubting my abilities, and eventually taking it out on a group of students, this one interaction (which lasted no more than two minutes) made me feel a sense of satisfaction, of momentum. I had experienced one victory.

My conversation with Elliott made me realize just how valuable my relationship with my students would be as a teacher. Of course, I believed that art had the power to "[call] us into relationship" (Gablik, 1991, p. 114). However, experiencing this amount joy that after talking to

*All names have been changed.

one child and helping him feel better, made me understand the effect that my interactions with

students would have on me and the way I teach.

> *I felt so proud to not only be implementing good strategies, but to be bridging the gap between work-school and school-school. I want to make more of an effort to use the readings to my advantage.*
>
> Journal Entry, November 8, 2014

> *It was so amazing to hear about their topics and to talk with them about these issues. They were so excited to plan their posters, and when someone asked if we could send the posters to the President, and I said, "why not?"*
>
> Journal Entry, November 21, 2013

> *Last semester, I felt like I needed to plan weekly lessons for my classes. It was exhausting, and even though I had the best intentions, I didn't feel like the majority of the projects were meaningful... Toward the end of the semester, I started planning lessons that were much more layered and personal.*
>
> Journal Entry, February 8, 2014

> *I am overall less stressed about controlling my classes, or looking more authoritative. I haven't given up at all, but I am trying to pick my battles more... I don't know if anything has changed other than my attitude, but I am slowly becoming more confident in addressing issues with students.*
>
> Journal Entry, February 8, 2014

Throughout the year, my relationship with my students became more important as I

navigated my way through developing curriculum, figuring out classroom management, and

integrating my roles as a graduate student and teacher. Instead of asking myself what I would

teach my students, I considered, "What experiences will they be able to share?" It became more

important for me to create opportunities for dialogue with my students, rather than obsessing

over an appearance of control and order. I also learned to be aware of opportunities to employ

methods and strategies I was learning in my graduate art education and studio art classes. I began

to see teaching as a more holistic experience that required me to attend to my students' needs as

learners, artists, and people. I also saw the process of learning to teach as one that was dependent

on the relationships I was able to cultivate.

My interaction with Elliott was not a "lightbulb" moment that immediately eliminated my first-year struggles. I still had difficulties with some students, and I still tried to plan meaningful lessons and units, wondering "Am I doing it right?" However, over time, I recognized the fact that if I was *open* to this sort of relationship with my students and the kind of moments that dissipated the imagined boundaries between us, it became easier to talk with students who were being disruptive. I worried less about planning perfect lessons and instead made an effort to design projects that would give my students a chance to incorporate and build on their own personal experiences and curiosities. Blending theory and practice became more a question of "How can I relate to my students *in this moment* using my previous knowledge or my own personal experiences?" Seeing teaching as a collection of these individual moments and opportunities was much easier than trying to "figure it all out."

4.1. Teaching as Mutual Mark Making

Metaphor is often used in visual or literary arts-based research not only as a means of enhancing the communicative potential of the research, but also to provide a framework within which the author operates. Employing the metaphor of teaching as mutual mark making, I would like to explore education as a process made up of individual actions, decisions, and connections that affect the student and teacher individually and in relation to one another. To make a mark on a paper, canvas, or landscape, is to change it. The brush, pencil, pen, create marks that slowly become something more. Even after a form emerges, it is never finished to the point of being unchangeable.

As a teacher, I am a mark maker. The decisions I make, the things I say, and the way I choose to act will impact my students and the way they view art and what art class means. Like many first-year teachers, I entered the profession with a desire to make an impact on my students

and the way they thought about art; to inspire them to "notice what there is to be noticed" (Greene, 1999) about the world and each other. However, my students are far from passive spectators; their statements, questions, and concerns all make their marks on me, each awakening a new opportunity for me to develop as an educator. Teaching is thus a reflective and reflexive process through which I have learned how to teach, as well as how to learn from, my students.

4.2. Narratives as Sketches

My autoethnographic investigation is made up of narratives of my experiences as a student and as a teacher. In this way, "I am both the author and focus of the story, the one who tells and the one who experiences, the observer and the observed, the creator and the created" (Ellis, 2009, p. 13). I consider my autoethnographic exploration a means of illustrating the profound moments of my first year, sometimes vulnerable, sometimes triumphant. These illustrations are far from perfect, just as I am imperfect and constantly developing. In formulating a he*art*ful autoethnography (1999), I seek to create a language around the complicated, organic, and fluid nature of my experiences. As an autoethnographer, I make marks on a page, sometimes loose and messy, sometimes decisive and strong, as a method of expressing what cannot be expressed otherwise.

In presenting these narratives as present-tense vignettes, or "sketches," I hope to convey the divergent nature of memory as it relates to my experiences as a teacher and as a student. Sketches are often used to plan a larger work of art. The process of sketching can be quick and momentary. It can also be added to, changed, and altered without changing the integrity of the final work. Because sketching shows a process, rather than product, I feel that it illustrates my constant evolution as teacher. The process of mutual mark making that my students and I enter into becomes a sketch, an image of who I am as a teacher in that moment. We are not fixed in

our roles; rather, we may go back and add to our collective sketch in order to resolve a situation. Moment by moment, the marks that my students and I make will change the appearance of these sketches, and who I was as a teacher yesterday may be different from the teacher I am today.

The sketches I present are interconnected; though they focus on various themes that relate to my own school art experience and my experiences with my students, they are all a part of who I have become as a teacher, and who I am becoming. Since I began teaching, I have come to agree that "it is really impossible to teach without learning as well as learning without teaching" (Freire, 1985, p. 16-17). As a result, my sketches are often paired together in order to create a sense of dialogue between them. Some of the couplets of sketches reveal a relationship between interactions I have had with my students as a teacher and conversations I have had with my teachers as a student. A few of my couplets include sketches that reveal the sometimes opposing forces that dominate my teaching styles. They are included together to illustrate the fact that I can sometimes be a different teacher on different days, and that my experiences in the classroom with my students are constantly requiring me to negotiate and renegotiate my stance as an art educator. They also implore me to put my ideals into practice. In some instances, I have come up short. However, these instances have only pushed me harder to not only articulate what I find important in teaching art, but to support it with thoughtful and attentive action.

4.3. Sketches

"I'm done."

Sarah, a third grader, comes up to me in art class and points to her small-scale sculpture, a tiny branch glued onto a piece of cardboard roughly 4 x 4 inches. The cardboard has been covered with neon green copy paper, which is cut to fit the size of the base.

The third graders are designing sculptures for special places in their community, using

natural and reclaimed materials. We have looked at various Atlanta-based artists and discussed how they used these materials to create sculptures that have enhanced and transformed the city. The kids seemed excited to get started, and I was excited to give them the freedom to choose their subject matter, imagery, and materials.

Looking around the room, I see that the rest of the class is busy building, painting, and collaborating. They have only been working on this project for one class period, and it seems like they are enjoying this project. Nonetheless, I am disappointed that Sarah is ready to call it quits.

I look at Sarah. She is very talented, but equally as stubborn. I know she loves art because she takes lessons after school, and her technical skill level is beyond that of the typical third grader. However, she is often the first one "done" and seems to lack motivation in class. She looks up at me with brown eyes that I can't quite read. I decide to test her.

"You're not done," I joke. "We've only just started!"

"But…I'm done," she says slowly. She looks confused.

"Okay." Trying another angle, I gently ask her to tell me about her sculpture.

"It's a tree, for my backyard."

"Why did you decide to make a sculpture for your yard?"

"I guess it's an important place for me and my family."

"Okay, good." At least this is somewhat important for her. "Now let's look at this together. Can you think of anything specific that you can add or change to your sculpture to make it relate more to this place? Colors you could add that you find in your yard? Symbols or images that make you think of your yard?"

Sarah shakes her head slowly as she thinks about it. She really wants to be done.

This isn't the first time Sarah and I have had this conversation. No matter what project we are doing, no matter how open-ended it is, Sarah rushes to finish.

I look at her sculpture and decide to be honest with her. "Well…the thing that concerns me is that we just started the project last class. I was hoping that you guys could spend more time on it to show how your sculpture represents your special place. Right now…your sculpture is a bit small…" I start hesitantly; I am trying to offer specific feedback, but I don't want to hurt Sarah's feelings. She looks at me, waiting for me to say more.

"How about this?" I offer after a pause. "Why don't we treat this like a small model of the new sculpture you're going to make? I wonder if you would be able to use something larger to make your sculpture of your tree. That way, you could add more details."

I wait for her response, my stomach tight. I'm not sure how I will respond if she keeps insisting that she doesn't want to do more.

"Oh, I know what I can do!" Sarah gets right to work making a larger version of her tree sculpture. This time she creates a larger base from cardboard and paints it. She pokes a hole in the bottom and places a large stick through it, then attaches smaller sticks to make a tree. She finds glittery wrapping twine in the recycle bin and decorates her sculpture.

Eventually, she needs help using hot glue to attach her "trunk" to the cardboard base. As I am gluing, I ask her how she feels about this new sculpture. She says that she feels good, and I can tell that she is much less tense about the project. We make eye contact, and she looks down before adding, "Sometimes it's hard for me to come up with ideas when someone doesn't tell me what to do."

I'm surprised by her candor. I look at Sarah, smiling. "Yeah," I say slowly. "It is *hard to think of ideas. It can be hard for me to think of ideas, too. But," I add optimistically, "that's why*

we are doing projects like this in third grade, so when you are older it won't be so hard."

    Sarah nods and smiles, and I hand her sculpture back to her.

       The sketch above describes a conversation that occurred between me and Sarah about a month before the end of the school year. I have had numerous conversations with students who wanted to quit early, or who felt "stuck" while working on their projects. However, I believe that this sketch in particular illustrates the tension I felt as a first-year art teacher, as well one of the many interactions with students that have made me confront my own experiences as a learner.

       Sarah's statement that "sometimes it's hard for me to come up with ideas when someone doesn't tell me what to do" caused me to flash back to my own art experiences. Like Sarah, one of my favorite activities was copying pictures from books as a child. I sometimes made up small stories or characters, but I loved to see how I accurately I could represent something that already existed. The printed pictures challenged me to mimic them, to perfect my hand in re-creating what I saw. This is what I associated with being "good" at art. By the time I got to college, even after years of not practicing, I had the same view of what it meant to be an artist. I felt confident when completing teacher-designed projects, yet the end-of-semester projects, which were completely open-ended, made me anxious. What was it I wanted to say?

       Sarah's admission was at once vulnerable and brave, and in that moment I felt a sense of admiration for her as I considered my own vulnerabilities as a student. While I liked many of my elementary teachers, I never felt comfortable being honest if I had a problem. I would think of it as *my* problem, something that I needed to figure out on my own. Sarah not only articulated her own challenges, but she also trusted me enough to tell me. In that moment between me and Sarah, any superficial hierarchy that separated us dissolved. We were both learners, trying to

figure things out. We were both affected by our previous experiences, which led us to this moment of dialogue, of connection.

Sarah's statement also resonated with me as a first-year teacher; at a new school, with no provided curriculum, I had a freedom that many art teachers would envy. No one was telling me what to do, and the process of figuring things out on my own was a process of trial and (lots of) error. I sometimes felt conflicted as an educator, a sense of dissonance between what I want to teach and how to go about teaching it (Bullock & Galbraith, 1992).

I was passionate about creating projects through which students could use their own experiences. I agreed with Lowenfeld, who stated that "Art Education, introduced in the early years of childhood may well mean the difference between a flexible creative human being and one who, in spite of all learning, will not be able to apply it and will remain an individual who lacks inner resources and has difficulty in his relationship to the environment" (as quoted in Burton, 2009, p. 325). This relationship to the environment was interesting to me, and throughout the year, I often tried to consider what my students could "learn about the functions and value of art in contemporary life" (Gude, 2013, p. 13). I tried to incorporate local and contemporary artists into as many projects as I could so that my students could begin to see art as something not simply reserved for museums or galleries, but as something that existed in their own communities.

I wanted the art my students made to be important to them; I wanted it to show thought and care. I also wanted to help each student get to a point where he or she could look at their work with pride. However, I often questioned how far I should go: what was I supposed to do when a student was completely satisfied with their project, even though it appeared that they had just scratched the surface of their capabilities?

I usually decided to try to look deeply at my students' work, talk to them about it and give honest and constructive criticisms that will help them either re-assess their work or ask themselves questions that they hadn't initially thought of. Often, this meant that my students would revise or add to their work in some way. These changes seemed to be positive, and my students appeared much more satisfied with the end result. However, I often wondered if this was a realization of the student's vision or my own. Was the creativity I wanted my students to strive for a "euphemism for control" (Check, 2000, p. 139)?

When I looked at Sarah's original sculpture, it appeared that she had treated this project as more of a short activity, rather than the meaningful project I had envisioned. I started to wonder if I had designed a project that was meaningful to me and not the students. The rest of the class was busy working, collaborating, adding to their sculptures, but looking at Sarah's made me think twice about this lesson. Delacruz (2000) observes that just as teachers influence their students' success, "student attitudes, behaviors, and accomplishments influence how teachers feel about their professional lives" (p. 13). In that moment, my insecurities surfaced as I wondered whether or not I had designed an effective project.

I remembered that in one of my art education classes, we had discussed creativity and how to urge students to expand on their ideas. I remembered one quote in particular from one of our readings: "Your first idea is practically never your best idea" (Starko, 2010, p. 195). Keeping this in mind, I decided to try to see the connection between Sarah's experience and the artwork she was making. I wanted to *listen* to Sarah so that together, we could come up with a plan to elaborate on her sculpture. While I felt conflicted about how to help Sarah think of more ideas (and if that was even necessary), I decided in that moment to ask more questions as a way to show an authentic interest in her art and engage her in a deeper thought process.

I was relieved when Sarah became excited about creating a new sculpture because I place my own value as an art educator on how my students respond to the projects I design. On the one hand, this demonstrates my belief that "the more efficaciously I manage to provoke the student into an exploration and refinement of his or her curiosity, the better I am as a teacher" (Freire, 1998, p. 106). One the other hand, my sensitivity to my students' opinions about art class also reveals my insecurity as a first-year teacher and a "fear of performance" that Baer (2012) explores.

In this case, the dialogue that occurred between me and Sarah was fruitful; she completed not one, but two additional sculptures, each relating to her special place (her backyard) in different ways. She presented them proudly on the last day of class.

Did I miss something? I think to myself. I am in my elementary school art class, and my art teacher has shown my class her display of our self-portraits inspired by the Mona Lisa. After looking at Leonardo's painting, Ms. Schneider had asked us to create a self-portrait in this style and include a landscape in the background.

I love art. I have loved it for as long as I can remember. But in this moment, looking around at these drawings, I feel like I did something wrong. My classmates' artworks look nearly identical; they employ the same neutral colors found in Leonardo's painting, and their figures all wear the same understated garments. My colorful self-portrait, which shows me as a fancy princess in front of a magical landscape, is clearly not like everyone else's.

I think back to Ms. Schneider's face as I showed her my work in progress, beaming at my unfinished accomplishment. Her smile appeared fake and plastered to her face, and her eyes were wide. "That's…nice!" she had said, but I didn't feel as proud as I had before I raised my hand

In art class, I work quietly on my latest project. It is a worksheet, a coloring page reproduction of Seurat's A Sunday Afternoon on the Island of La Grande Jatte *. Using colored pencils, I create dots inside the lines. I am bored, but I guess this is what art class is.*

I am in the eighth grade. This is my only memory of my middle school art experience.

When I think back on my elementary and middle school art experiences, these are the only two that stand out. I don't remember forming relationships with my teachers, or even having conversations with them. We had different roles, and the dynamic of "the teacher teaches and the student learns" was static (Freire, 1985, p. 17).

As first-year teacher, I often reflected on these early memories of my own art education. It soon occurred to me that these memories, which show an absence of meaningful school art experiences, may have given me the motivation to pursue art education as a way of reclaiming my experiences as a child. I not only wanted to teach art in a way that was meaningful for my students, but I wanted to do it because of what my own art experiences had lacked. I had remembered my teachers' presence as absence (Freire, 1998), but I wanted make an effort to be present in my students' experiences.

"I want to touch them so bad. But the docents yell at you. Sometimes I touch them anyway, when they aren't looking."

I am on a field trip with my eleventh-grade art history class. We are at the Frist Center for the Visual Arts in Nashville. The exhibit on display now is full of modern art, my favorite. Ms. Newton has walked through the galleries with us, and now we are in front of a painting by Vincent Van Gogh.

"It's called 'impasto,' she had told us in class, referring to the texture of Van Gogh's oil paintings. The thick paint is raised on the canvas, so that you could actually feel the swirls of paint dancing along the surface. Ms. Newton, looking at the painting, is so close her nose almost touches the glass protecting it. Nearby, a docent clears his throat. Our teacher smiles sheepishly and takes half a step back.

Ms. Newton was one of those teachers who made her students excited to learn because we could tell she was so excited to teach. The first class I had with her was my tenth grade world history class, and I could tell early on that she would be among my favorite teachers. The way she presented information made it clear just how passionate she was about her subject. One of the youngest teachers at my school, Ms. Newton seemed like a smart an interesting older sister; when she became engaged during spring semester, I crowded around her desk with the rest of the girls from class as she showed off her new ring and told us what her new last name would be.

When, at the end of my tenth grade year, Ms. Newton announced that she would be teaching AP Art History the following year, I was interested immediately. I had not taken an art class since middle school, where it was required to take specials in 9-week rotations, and I saw the art history class as a way to reconnect with art, and to do it under the guidance of a teacher for whom I had immense respect.

Art history was by far my favorite subject in high school. When the lights were off and the projector was on, Ms. Newton would take us through history, weaving beautiful narratives specific to each work of art and its broader importance in its culture's history. She would smile a crooked smile, and her eyes would get wide with excitement, as if she were seeing the images for

the first time. Her passion was obvious and just as contagious. I knew I wasn't alone; looking around the room during class, I would see that my classmates were just as enchanted as I was.

It wasn't just that Ms. Newton was a skilled teacher, adept at filling the room with enthusiasm as she dispensed knowledge upon her students. She was also the first teacher I had who made it clear that she was learning as well. When she began teaching art history, she had just passed the AP certification test. While she had previously been interested in art, she by no means considered herself an expert; she was learning, just like us. If she didn't know the answer to a question, she would either look it up quickly, or be honest and tell us that she didn't know. I appreciated her honesty and humility, which were important qualities for me to witness as a high school student. Unsure of where I wanted to apply to college after high school and often anxious over the amount of work I had to complete for my demanding honors and AP classes, I found it refreshing to encounter an adult who not only was learning material along with us, but who was excited to be on this journey.

Ms. Newton inspired me to choose Art History as a college major, and she was the teacher I looked back on when I considered entering a master's program in art education. I wanted to be the kind of teacher that could make others feel passion for art. I wanted to inspire students to look more closely at the world around them, to consider the interconnectedness of art and life. I still think of Ms. Newton, and as a teacher, I remind myself of the importance of passion and the willingness to learn along with my students. To this day, when I'm at a museum looking at an interesting painting, I see just how close I can get to it before a docent clears his throat.

"Alright, Stephanie." Eric, my undergraduate drawing and painting professor, walks up to my easel as I attempt to paint the still-life in front of me. "Let's see where you're at." Wearing

a flannel shirt, blue jeans with a belt, and hiking boots (his unofficial uniform), Eric reminds me of a cowboy. He pulls up a stool to sit beside me and looks at me with open, blue eyes. He expects me to say something, but stays patient.

I don't really know what to say, but I'm sure Eric will. "It's going ok." I glance sideways at him, wondering how he is judging my work. "I think?"

"Well," he says decisively, "I think it's going very well." He looks intently at my painting and furrows his brow; no matter how well I'm doing, he always offers a suggestion. Pointing to the shaded area below the hip bone I've been working on, he says, "You might want to look at this again. Remember, these are going to be your darkest darks."

"Okay," I nod. Looking at the shaded area, I see what he means. I get back to work, mixing up my darkest darks.

It is my second week of teaching. I am in a third grade classroom, and the students have been drawing pictures of their communities. I walk over to Denise, who is working quietly on her drawing. Denise is shy around me and doesn't make eye contact often. I can tell she doesn't like art because she often says "I can't" and seems to lack confidence in her abilities.

I really want to form a connection with her so that she can feel more confident in class, so I decide to check in with her.

"Hey, Denise. How's it going?" I ask.

"Good," Denise mumbles, looking down.

"Can you tell me about your drawing?"

"It's the Clarkston Community Center." She is still looking down.

"What's that?" I ask, pointing to a place on her paper.

"It's a man on a bench."

I see that her drawing seems bare. I think about the strategies I have read about in my elementary art education books and wonder if I should encourage her to "fill the whole page."

"Can you think of anyone else you would like to include in your picture? Maybe other people from the community center?"

"No." Denise is still looking down.

"Ok. Well…keep going!" I smile and leave her table, feeling awkward about our exchange.

At the end of class, it's time to share. To my surprise, Denise raises her hand. I call on her, and she walks to the front of the circle. She is now smiling as she talks:

"This is the Clarkston Community Center. I come here a lot with my family. Here is the banner on the front of the community center; we didn't have enough money to build a sign, so we decided to make a banner instead. I worked on this 'C.' And here is a man sitting the bench that I helped make. I love the Clarkston Community Center because even if we don't have lots of money, we can still make our own things and be creative."

I am more surprised than I would like to admit and a little ashamed that I was so quick to judge Denise's art based on arbitrarily rules. She didn't fill up the whole space of her paper, and she didn't add many details, but what a story! I am thrilled.

Eric was one of my favorite college professors as an undergraduate student. My art history professors were animated and passionate in class, weaving narratives and personal stories through their lectures. Eric was more subdued and thoughtful. He definitely had a talkative side (sometimes he would go off on tangents during critiques, telling stories that only eventually made sense in relation to a student's work), but for the most part, Eric would walk around during

class, looking closely at our work and offering suggestions. There were always suggestions, because there was always something we could do to improve. This didn't bother me, and in fact, I liked the fact that Eric didn't gush or praise us; it made his approval that much more valuable, and positive feedback more special. Before I started teaching, I knew that I wanted to employ a similar style of conversational teaching. I wanted to avoid gushing over my students' work and instead offer constructive comments that would encourage them to go even farther than they thought they could go. I saw this as an effort to bring my experiences as an art student into my art class; in treating my students as artists, and the classroom as a studio, I thought I would help them become more reflective and thoughtful about what they created.

However, the sketch above illustrates that this approach was not particularly beneficial to my interactions with Denise. Though as a college student I appreciated when my professors gave me specific direction instead of blanketed praise, my interactions with my elementary students would need to be more gentle and encouraging.

At first glance, I wasn't able to grasp the totality of Denise's artwork. I only saw her art as it related to my idea of how I thought it should look; in other words, I relied on my "interpretations and limited vision" (Check, 2000, p. 138) to inform how complete I felt Denise's art was. Denise's beautiful explanation of her drawing caused me to realize two things: first of all, I had assumed a need (Noddings, 2012) of one of my students based on shallow criteria, and, secondly, that there was a difference between how Denise discussed her art with me and how she presented it to her classmates. There was a level of "mutual trust" (Freire, 2000) that had not yet been achieved.

I often ask questions when discussing art with my students because I feel that it is important for them to have a chance to be heard, and for them to know that I want to listen. In a

previous sketch (which took place near the end of the school year), my asking Sarah additional

questions about her art was helpful: in that specific instance, my questions led her to think more

deeply about her project and how to enhance it. Yet, in the case with Denise, my questioning was

not as successful. Why?

First of all, my conversation with Sarah was different from my conversation with Denise.

Sarah had approached *me*, telling me that she was done. As a result, I asked her questions about

her sculpture in hopes that in speaking about its significance, she might stumble onto something

new that was worth exploring. Denise did not ask for help, nor did she claim to be done. In this

instance, I believe that approaching Denise, and doing so because her paper looked "bare," was

presumptuous on my part. In assuming that my student needed me, needed my help, I assumed

the role of teacher-missionary that Freire (1985) denounces, thus presenting obstacles that made

it more difficult for me to establish a trusting interaction with Denise in that moment.

Secondly, although I asked Denise questions because I genuinely wanted to know more

about her art, I also had an end goal in mind: that Denise would add more to her drawing, so that

it would look more "complete" in *my* eyes. At the time, I believed that I was encouraging her to

make art that was meaningful, yet I failed to realize that it was up to me to be open and patient

enough to *hear* the meaning in her art when she was ready to speak.

"Ms. Gill?" Andrew, a second grader, asks as I walk by his table. "Can you draw a

person for me?" He smiles, as if he knows what I'm about to say.

I return the smile. "Well, I won't draw it for you. But let's look at your drawing together.

Can you show me where you're having trouble?" I lean over to look at his drawing.

"I just don't like it," he says vaguely.

"Ok…" I look around and I see quite a few students with their hands raised, needing my

attention. I feel rushed. "Do you mind?" I ask before grabbing the pencil from Andrew's table.

Andrew shakes his head.

I start to draw lightly in Andrew's sketchbook, first a small circle, then a long oval below it. "I like to start with shapes first. See?"

Andrew nods.

I continue to draw a picture of a boy, explaining what I'm doing as I do it. "So you want to make sure that the neck is wide enough to support the head, so it should only be a bit narrower than the head."

Seeing more hands go up out of the corner of my eye, I move on to draw the boy's body, then baggy clothes and shoes. I have stopped talking and am just drawing now. "Wow. You're really good," Andrew says. I cringe.

When I finish, I say, "Ok. So just start out with shapes and go from there." I know I haven't taught him anything. I start to erase, but Andrew asks me if I can leave the drawing in his sketchbook. Hesitantly, I agree.

I watch Andrew for the rest of class as he looks at my drawing, then back at his paper, erasing constantly.

"May I?" my professor, Richard, asks. I am in the drawing and painting studio of Georgia State University, trying to draw the live model in front of me. I have been anxious since I ran in, sweating and ashamed for being late to my second class. Now, trying to draw this naked man on a stool in the center of the room, I feel like I am out of my league. It has been years since I took a studio course, and I feel self-conscious about drawing in front of these strangers in my cohort.

Richard takes my charcoal and rubs it over the paper, back and forth. "So…you might

want to bring this leg…here," he says as he works, shifting his focus back and forth between the drawing and the model. His confident ebony lines slowly consume the page, covering up my weaker ones. After a minute or so, Richard sets the charcoal back on my easel and steps back to look at his work. He squints his eyes and smiles at me as if to ask, "Does that make sense?" I nod and quietly say thanks.

> *I cannot see my drawing anymore. It's no longer mine.*

Throughout my first year of teaching, I received a few requests from my students to "help" them with their art by drawing something for them. I would usually tell them that I wouldn't draw anything for them, but I could look at their drawing with them to figure out how to improve it. They would often ask me why, and my response would be, "because it's your art, not mine." It wasn't until I drew inside Andrew's sketchbook that I remembered what it felt like to have someone draw on top of my work.

When I began Richard's Directed Study course, the last art course I had taken was as an undergraduate (five years prior to entering the master's program in art education), so I felt a little out of place sitting next to my new peers. Some of them had just graduated from fine arts programs (with knowledge and practice fresh in their minds), and others participated in exhibitions regularly. I simply had trouble finding enough art to create a decent portfolio for my admissions application. Even though I took studio art classes in college, I had by no means considered myself an "artist"; I thought the term was pretentious and inaccessible. Surrounded by "artists," I felt like an outsider.

When Richard approached me in class, I felt that he wanted to help. His kind demeanor told me not to worry. But because I already felt self-conscious and a bit overwhelmed, Richard's

helpful gesture made me feel like I was "less than." The drawing he created over my own was beautiful, and I received compliments from my classmates who initially thought it was mine. But in looking at the new drawing, I became unsure of my artistic abilities.

It is worth mentioning that the life-drawing activity I described above was one of the only teacher-led assignments I completed in Richard's class; for the majority of my semester in the directed study course, my classmates and I spent hours in the studio, working on our own individual projects. I loved having Richard as a professor. He seemed to achieve the perfect balance between taking the time to offer me and my classmates constructive criticism and giving us the time and space to work independently in order to figure out what it was we wanted to say through our art. However, this particular instance, though not indicative of Richard's teaching style, or even of my experience in his class, made a mark on me.

My student, Andrew, had asked me for help, but I was hesitant to draw for him because I feared that he would focus more on replicating my drawing than understanding how to draw a figure. I also, however, felt unsure of how to address his questions quickly so that I could help the other students in his class. I missed an opportunity to help Andrew, and instead presented my drawing as something he should copy. As I looked at my drawing next to Andrew's, I felt guilty that I had overstepped my boundaries, that in drawing inside Andrew's sketchbook (and not on a scratch piece of paper), that I had implicitly stated, "This is what your drawing should look like." When Andrew complimented me on my drawing, I felt ashamed because all of a sudden, this moment was about *me* and not about Andrew.

After that day, when a student asked me why I wouldn't draw for them, I decided to explain what had happened during my studio class with Richard. Giving my students a personal

example from my own life, and explaining how small things can make a difference, seemed to resonate with them.

At dinner, a friend and I are talking about our studio class together with Richard. She surprises me by saying, "Yeah, I remember in that class you did a lot of erasing. You really wanted your drawings to be perfect."

I think about it. I hate to think of myself as a perfectionist, but sometimes I can get overwhelmed by small details in my work. I smile sheepishly and admit, "I guess I did."

Nicholas is not an easy student to relate to. He is not one of those kids that lights up when I enter a room, saying "Yes! I love art!" He's what you would call a "tough crowd." No matter what project the class is working on, Nicholas finds a problem with it. Sometimes he says staunchly, "I don't want to do that." Other times, he tells me matter-of-factly that he wants me to do it for him. Yet, I still find him fascinating. Maybe it's because I enjoy a challenge, but no matter how rude or antisocial he is, there is a part of me that thinks he has so much to offer.

The class is working on redesigning the book covers for their favorite books using colored pencil and watercolor. They have been working on this project for a few class periods; first they sketched out a few ideas in their sketchbooks then drew on their final piece of paper before using the colored pencil and watercolor.

Nicholas approaches me, fuming.

Oh god, I think. I swallow and ask innocently, "What's wrong?"

"This is garbage," he yells, his brow furrowed and eyes flaring. "I…I'm going to throw it away and start over."

"Why don't you show me what's wrong?" I ask.

Nicholas points to an area of his paper where he spilled a little bit of watercolor on top

of his picture of a crocodile. "It's terrible."

"It looks like you've worked really hard on this. I'd rather you not throw it away and start over."

"But why?!" He is clearly upset.

"Well, first of all, this paper that we use is really nice. It's expensive. So if we are going to be able to use it for the whole year, we can't waste it. Now, you already planned out everything in your sketchbook, but it still might not be perfect. And that's ok." He still looks upset. "Even if you think you've made a mistake, I bet you can turn it into something else," I encourage him.

"I can't turn it into something else!"

I start to feel tense. I have only a few rules in art class, and one of them is that we don't waste materials by starting over. Making mistakes gives us an opportunity to make our art even better, I have told my students. However, Nicholas is stubborn, and I don't want this to turn into a power struggle.

"Alright," I say. "It seems like you're upset. Maybe I will give you a minute to cool off." I walk away feeling disappointed in myself, wondering if this is the day I just won't be able to get through to him.

Less than ten minutes later, Nicholas runs up to me. "Ms. Gill! I figured out what I could turn it into!" His eyes are alive with pride as he shows me his painting. "I made it into a swamp! Crocodiles live in swamps."

He doesn't even look at me for approval, but I still gush, "Nicholas! That's awesome! You solved your problem! I'm glad you didn't give up. How do you feel?"

"Amazing." He smiles and returns to his seat to get back to work.

I have mixed emotions about starting over. On the one hand, I admire it when a student can admit to him or herself that whatever they are doing just isn't working. However, I want my students to develop a "disposition to tolerate ambiguity, to explore what is uncertain" (Eisner, 2002, p. 10). The element of the unknown is not only a primary function of art production, but it is also a fundamental component of life, and Eisner asserts that "it is from surprise that we are more likely to learn something" (Eisner, 2002, p. 8). I remembered these passages as I spoke with Nicholas, and I really wanted him to be able to learn something from this "surprise." I thought that if I just pushed him enough, I could help him learn not to give up at the first sign of trouble.

My conversation with Nicholas was a "trial and error" on my part. I moved quickly from explaining an economical reason for not wanting him to start over, to discussing why I felt it was important for him to persevere through his problems. Each explanation seemed to make him angrier. Finally, I had to walk away. I wasn't sure that he needed time to cool off, or that he would even use the time to cool off, but I did know that I wasn't making any progress, and I was starting to feel frustrated.

Of course, I was thrilled that Nicholas was able to problem-solve on his own. However, this ability seemed more a symptom of Nicholas' specific learning style, and not as a result of a perfect strategy that I employed. I did learn that what Nicholas needed in that moment was to be pushed to not give up. He also needed space to work by himself. However, as explained in the subsequent sketch, I learned that teaching is not "one size fits all," and that some students need a bit of extra assistance to gain confidence.

> *"Noah took off his shoes. He's crying on the rug." I'm in a first grade classroom close to the end of the day, when a student informs me of Noah's state. Noah had been working on a*

personal symbol design and apparently made a small mistake - with permanent marker.

Noah is the kind of student who is either hyper-focused on what he is doing, or completely unfocused and not in control of his actions. He can be incredibly meticulous, which would explain why a small misstep could have such a detrimental effect. Noah is distraught, to say the least. Indeed, his shoes have been flung on the classroom rug, where he is lying down sobbing. Really sobbing. There is snot dripping from his nose, and he struggles to catch his breath. I sit down next to him and ask him to tell me what's wrong as I keep my eye on the rest of the students (many of which share Noah's tenuous attention span).

"I...messed...up..." he blubbers, tears still streaming down his face.

"Why don't you put your shoes back on and show me where you messed up?"

Reluctantly, he fumbles to get his shoes on his feet, then clumsily walks over his table to show me his mistake. I can barely notice it, but I feel the need to be delicate. "I see what you mean. But honestly, I wouldn't be able to tell that it was a mistake if you hadn't said something. Let's think of a way to cover it up, or turn it into something else."

"I can't," Noah moans, still crying. "I want to start over."

"Noah," I say gently, "class is almost over, and we've already been working on this project for two class periods. Tomorrow, I have to send everyone's artworks to the fundraising company so you can get your catalogs. But," I add, "I bet we can add more lines to make a design, or even draw a picture using that line."

"No," Noah sobs pitifully. Before I can do anything, he crumples up his paper into a ball.

By now it's time to clean up. I tell Noah that we will think of something (I will think of something), and that it will be alright. I feel like the situation is unresolved, and I wonder what more I could have done to help Noah avoid a meltdown.

"Basically, students will be successful if they follow the directions in each lesson," Naomi tells me. Naomi is an art teacher at a private school in Atlanta, and my school has sent the specials teachers there to take a look at the art, music, and P.E. programs.

I am helping her unload the drying rack, which is full of kindergarten and first grade art. "These look great," I tell her.

"Well, you know" she says, "sometimes the Art Fairy comes around and fixes it for them after class."

I smile, but I feel puzzled (and, frankly, a little judgmental). Why would a teacher fix a student's art? Isn't that just like a band-aid? How will the student learn how to deal with disappointment and solve their own problems?

In my office, I take my scissors and retrieve Noah's personal symbol design from my cart. I smooth it out as best as possible and slowly begin cutting around the symbol, making sure to leave out the Sharpie "mistake" in the background. I find a new piece of paper, provided by the fundraising company, and write Noah's name, teacher's name, and grade.

With a glue stick, I glue Noah's drawing in the center of the page. The wrinkles in his colored pencil and marker drawing have created a tie-dye effect that actually looks really interesting. Still, I hope Noah doesn't freak out.

With time left before my first class, I walk to Noah's classroom to show him his new artwork. I ask him to please color the background before the end of the week, so it can be ready in time to mail. He looks stunned, but I can tell he's relieved. "Okay."

In my first year of teaching, I experienced a conflict between encouraging my students to take ownership of their work and wanting them to be happy with the work they produced. The two are not mutually exclusive, but sometimes I wondered if I valued problem-solving at the expense of student confidence. Can a student solve his or her own problems if he or she feels incapable of doing so?

Noah's emotional outburst over making a mistake was difficult to watch. As his teacher, I felt a responsibility to provide him with a positive art experience, and my efforts to negotiate with him did nothing to soothe him. It seemed clear to me that he lacked the confidence necessary to fix this problem, or even to be open to fixing this problem.

If this had been a different project, I may have waited to see how Noah felt during the next class period before asking him to cut out his design and glue it to a separate page. However, I knew there was a limited amount of time before I had to send Noah's drawing to the fundraising company I was working with. This image would be transferred to coffee mugs and keychains, and given as Mother's Day and Father's Day gifts. In this case, I believed that it was more important for me to help Noah gain confidence and be proud of his work. Though I had initially judged Naomi's description of the Art Fairy, I feel that if I had stubbornly held onto what my "principles" were in that moment, I would have missed out on an opportunity to show Noah that I cared about him, that I cared about how he felt about his art.

The two sketches above, while focused on similar themes, represent two the tension that I felt during my first year of teaching. Each moment, each struggle, begged the question, "What is the right thing to do?" Just as my students are different people with distinct experiences, so too must my sense of "rightness" change in order to meet my students' needs.

First grade has finished an assemblage project. We have 20 minutes left in class, and instead of sharing, I want to do something different. I write the following questions on the board and ask the students to answer any or all of them inside their sketchbooks:

Did you enjoy working on this project? Why or why not?

Did you have any trouble working on this project? How did you solve your problems?

Did anyone help you?

I am eager to see what the students remembered most about this project and proud of myself for giving them the opportunity to reflect on their artistic processes. As I walk around, I notice that one of the students, Samantha, has written in her sketchbook: "I did not like this project because people kept talking to me."

I am surprised. I can't remember Samantha appearing frustrated during the course of the project; while she is usually pretty quiet, she seems to be an easygoing, happy-go-lucky child.

As the class is cleaning up and getting ready to go home, I ask Samantha to talk to me away from her classmates. I kneel down. "I noticed that in your sketchbook you wrote that you didn't like this project," I say gently, trying to show my concern. She nods slowly, showing little emotion on her face. I continue, "You wrote that people kept talking to you?"

"Yes," she tells me. "Everyone kept talking to me, and I couldn't concentrate."

I nod. I think of what it must feel like to be a child in school: always having to ask permission to go to the restroom, to blow your nose, to get out of your seat for any reason. I think of how trapped Samantha must have felt sitting in her seat, surrounded by voices, not knowing what to do about it. Or worse, not even realizing that there was something she could do to make the situation easier on herself.

I look Samantha in the eyes and say, "I'm sorry that that happened. Next time, if you are

having trouble concentrating, will you tell me? That way, we can find a more private place for you to work."

Samantha nods slowly, in a way that is difficult to read, and I thank her for talking to me. She lines up with the rest of the class. For all I know, she will forget about this moment. But I don't want to.

Sitting on the second floor of the studio, I am high above the voices of my friends. I look over the rail and see people moving from room to room. Do they notice me? I hope not.

Working in isolation, I am free from the feeling of trying to concentrate, trying to ignore the conversations around me, conversations I want to take part in but know will distract me from getting any work done. Here, there is nothing that surrounds or confines me. I take deep, long, breaths before pushing them out into the open space.

During my first drawing and painting class as a graduate student, I found myself spending the majority of my class talking with my friends instead of doing work (I had done the same thing in my undergraduate studio courses, spending the entire class time trying to focus, then ultimately taking my work back to my dorm to finish). One day, I decided that I needed to move away from my classmates if I was going to get any work done. I walked up the stairs to the second floor of the studio, which was a sort of "catwalk" that overlooked the studios below. I sat down on the floor next to an empty office, cross-legged, with my sketchbook on my lap. It felt so good to just be away from everyone, even though I could hear them talking below. I got a lot of thinking and planning done that day, and the second floor of the studio became a place of solace when I needed to work by myself.

Samantha's reflection forced me to imagine what it could have been like to be in her position, as a child and as a person. I considered the fact that children in school are not always permitted to be in control of their own bodies. Grube (2012) states that "with no constrained seating or need to ask permission to move, the body, like an aggregate of fragmented encounters, can send and receive the affects of others around them" (p. 40) Conversely, if these freedoms aren't allowed, the classroom can also be a place of constraint.

My physical position as I spoke with Samantha was a significant element of my interaction with her; as I knelt down in front of her, I was able to get a more accurate picture of what it is like to be a child in this world. I experienced an "embodied response" (Jeffers, 2009) as a result of the way I placed by body in relation to hers. In that moment, in literally putting myself in Samantha's position, I imagined a sense of enclosure; not feeling like I was able to move about freely in the classroom, not being able to experience the classroom as a place in which *I* learn, and learn in a healthy way according to *my* specific needs.

Freire (1998) stated that "it is listening to the student that I learn to speak with him or her" (1998a, p. 106). I had initially asked students to write reflections for themselves, so that they could remember the challenges and victories they faced while working on this project, in case they encountered them again. I also wanted to expose them to the kind of activities I had engaged in as a graduate student. In many of my classes, I was required to write reflections based on articles and readings, and it became habitual for me to look at theory in relation to my own life and experiences. As a novice teacher, I had also found that writing reflections urged me to think about my experiences instead of simply reacting to them. I thought that by asking my students to reflect, I was giving them an opportunity to think about how it felt to make art, how it felt to collaborate and learn from each other. After speaking with Samantha, however, I realized

that her reflection was just as beneficial to me as it was for her, perhaps even more so. In reading and discussing Samantha's reflection with her, I learned more about her and her specific needs. The reflection became a source of dialogue between Samantha and myself, and through her written words, Samantha was able to voice her needs in a way that she may never have done verbally.

I believe that the exchange between Samantha and I was a display of trust. In asking the students to reflect on their experiences, I wanted them to know that I trusted and valued their unique voices as both artists and people. In being able to write about her experience in her own words, sitting next to classmates, knowing that I (the teacher) was walking around and speaking with students about their reflections, Samantha showed that she felt a level of trust and comfort in class. However, the fact that Samantha felt she couldn't say something during work time also told me that although I see art class as a place of freedom, of love and caring, I needed to make it *more* obvious to my students.

> *Jennifer, a first grader, walks around carelessly with a paintbrush covered in paint. This is an accident waiting to happen, and Jennifer is clumsy, which means that the accident will probably happen soon.*
>
> *Calmly, I approach her and say, "Can you walk a bit more carefully with that brush, sweetie?" Jennifer nods and walk back to her table.*
>
> *"Did you hear what Ms. Gill just said?" she asks a friend, her eyes wide and proud. "She called me sweetie."*

> *It's the end of my second grade art period, and the class is cleaning up – at least, they are supposed to be cleaning up. I have had to remind them several times of the work that needs to be*

done (tables wiped, scraps of paper picked up off of the floor, materials put away), yet some

students continue to work, while others sit in their seats doing nothing to help. I feel myself

getting frustrated.

> *"Do you like teaching art?" Maria asks me as she cleans off her table.*
>
> *"Of course," I respond. "Does it seem like I do?"*
>
> *"Sometimes," she giggles.*

Freire (1985) states that "once teachers see the contradiction between their words and their actions, they have two choices. They can become shrewdly clear and aware of their need to be reactionary, or they can accept a critical position to engage in action to transform reality" (p. 18). Of all the sketches I have written, my brief interaction with Maria has been the most difficult to write because it forces me to see the contradiction between my words and actions. As I read it, I am reminded me that I am far from perfect, that even though I may call students "sweetie," I don't always give the impression that I am happy teaching art.

There are days when I forget the real reason I teach art. I tell my students' parents that I want to help cultivate a group of thoughtful individuals who are going to lead the world into the 21st century. I tell my students that I want them to have personal experiences with art and get the chance to make things that are meaningful to them. But somehow, in the midst of making sure my students clean up for themselves, take ownership of their environments, try their best, and push themselves, I forget that the real reason I teach art is that I am passionate about it, that I firmly believe in the power of art experiences to change the way people view the world.

These sketches show a difference between a superficial form of caring that I sometimes exhibit and a deeper form of caring that I must be more mindful of demonstrating. It is the

difference between *telling* my students that I care about them, and *showing* them that I care about my responsibility to them.

I'm in the teacher's lounge during lunch when a short woman with short hair bustles in, carrying a crock pot. She stops and looks around as if she has just remembered something. "Wait…is today Taco Tuesday? For the teachers?" She looks at me.

I smile and shrug. "I'm not sure. I hadn't heard anything about it. Maybe?"

She leaves the lounge and returns after a minute, out of breath. "Nope, not till tomorrow," she grunts in a deep voice as she lifts the crock pot. She seems rushed and a bit anxious.

I introduce myself to her, assuming she's a parent of one of my students. "Oh, hi, it's nice to meet you. Valerie. Sam's mom." We talk for awhile about her son, how much he loves art, and I find out that we have quite a few more things to chat about: our art backgrounds, our Puerto Rican families. Reaching for her phone, she asks me if I've seen "the video." I laugh and say no. She hands me her phone and I watch a video of Sam, dancing salsa as Gloria Estefan plays in the background.

Sam is, to my knowledge, an average third grade boy. He likes Minecraft and Legos and goofs off with his friends during class. He sometimes gets distracted when it's time to work on projects, but overall, he seems like a normal, "good" kid. Watching this video of him dancing (quite well) in his pajamas, smiling goofily as if somewhat aware of the bizarreness of his appearance, I'm ashamed to realize that Sam hasn't really stood out to me all year. Not in the way he stands out now.

I giggle and hand the phone back to her. "That was amazing."

"Yeah," she smiles fondly, looking at the image on her phone before putting it back in her

pocket. "You know, I just wanted to mention that if Sam is acting up in class at all, he's kind of going through a rough time at home."

"Oh. I haven't noticed anything different."

"Well, we're about to put Mama in the hospital for a few days. Me *Mama," she says, pointing to herself. "Yeah, they found another lump. I've been talking to him about it, saying, you know, Mama's gonna be way for awhile. But it's so I can be there for you for a long time. I just think he's worried. Plus, we have his three-year check up coming up with the cardiologist, to make sure his heart is ok. But I'm hopeful."*

I'm sure Valerie can see the look of surprise on my face. "Oh. I didn't know…" I trail off. I didn't know that Sam had health problems. I didn't know that Sam had any problems. There is so much I don't know.

She smiles. "Yeah, it's a lot for a kid." She shrugs as if to say, "But, what can you do?" She seems so calm about everything. I admire her strength. I admire Sam's strength.

"Thank you so much for telling us," is all I can say. "We will definitely make sure he feels safe here."

"Sshhh. Don't let her see!"

It's the second to last day of art class, and I hear whispers coming from Sam's table. Sam and a few of his classmates, all of whom have finished their sculpture project, are gathered around a piece of paper. After asking for it so that he could free draw, Sam had gotten right to work. Smirking with curiosity, I walk by and sneak a glance at the paper. It says "MS. GILL," vertically on the page. I keep walking, amused.

At the end of class, Sam comes up to me and hands me the paper. He is smiling from ear to ear as he awaits my response. He and his friends have made me an acrostic, with each letter

of my name beginning a word to describe me: "Most cool. So awesome. Great. Intelligent.

Loving. Loyal."

I look closely at the word "Loving," and smile, almost crying. I say thanks and give lots

of hugs.

I cannot say for sure that Sam's acrostic would have included the word "loving" if it had

been made prior to my conversation with Valerie three weeks earlier, but my gut tells me that it

wouldn't have. I wrote in my sketch that Sam didn't "stick out" to me as a student. In Sam's class,

only two boys in particular had to opportunity to stick out; in fact, they tended to dominate each

art class. Every Monday, I was faced with countless disruptions from these students

(interrupting, running around the classroom, antagonizing classmates), and I never quite knew

how to handle the situation.

I found that one-on-one attention often worked best, so I spent too much time redirecting

the students, talking to them about their decisions, and (a few times) sending them to the

principal's office. Unfortunately, this meant that all of the specialized attention that I gave these

students was at the expense of students like Sam, who were far from "average": students who

cared about learning, who wanted to help pass out and clean up materials, and who wanted to

help their friends get started on a project if they had been absent.

My conversation with Valerie reminded me that every one of my 384 students needed my

attention, and that even if their problems weren't obvious, they might still exist. My teaching

style did not change drastically in the last few weeks of school; I still felt the need to "zero in" on

disturbances, and this still took up a considerable amount of class time. However, when I talked

to Sam and his classmates, I made an effort to be present in the moment with them. I agree with

Mantas and DiRezze that "discipline is dialogue" (2011, p. 10). While I had made an effort to apply this to my students who were acting out, I sometimes forgot that this dialogue was necessary for me to cultivate positive relationships with all of my students. I wanted to use dialogue not just as a means of curtailing disasters or even finding out more about students' artworks. I needed to use dialogue as a means of checking in with them so they felt cared for, of "being with" them (Freire, 1998) as mindfully as possible. I asked Sam how his mom was doing after her surgery. I spent extra time with each group as they worked on their sculpture projects, asking them questions and making sure to answer theirs. These were small changes, but I tried to remind myself that I only got one class a week with my students, and that I should make it count.

"So, I want to talk to you guys about how you think this year has gone." I am in a third grade classroom, and we are wrapping up the last class of the year with a discussion on the rug. "What did you like about art this year?"

Looking at my students, eager to hear their responses, I realize that we have come full circle. I have spent the year asking them questions, giving them feedback on their projects, urging them to push themselves and their ideas, and here we are. I am ready for my critique.

Dylan starts us off: "I liked the collage we made because I got to use my imagination. (He stands up, in true dramatic Dylan fashion.) A lot of the things we did were, like…you didn't have to make something look exactly like something else. You had to use your imagination and creativity." I smile. A few of the students nod enthusiastically and raise their hands.

Becky clears her throat to speak, very theatrically. "Well," she smiles as she says sharply, "I really liked the sculpture project because I got to learn more about other people in the class. And I really liked the project we did earlier in the year, the "Place" project, because I got to make something that I had always wanted to make."

Janine raises her hand to go next. "Well," she says slowly in her deep voice. "I liked

fingerknitting because I got to be an 'expert' (she motions with her fingers in the air as she says

this) and teach my friends. And I liked doing the sculptures because I got to make something that

was important to me, and that was really cool." Janine says all of this in a dry voice well-suited

for a comedienne's stage. She doesn't make eye contact and instead looks up as if she is "too

cool" to be saying what she is saying. Nonetheless, I am touched.

Maya says, "I just really enjoyed spending time with you." I smile.

I have a feeling that we are running a few minutes over class time. Checking my phone, I

see that I have stayed almost thirty minutes over class time, not even realizing that the clock in

the room was off.

"Oh man, I've got to go! You have to go to lunch!" I rush to get my cart out the door. "I

had so much fun this year with you guys, and next year is going to be even better!"

Victor comes up to me before I can leave. "I didn't get to say what I wanted to say," he

calmly tells me. I apologize and ask him to go ahead.

"I just wanted to say that, like…every project we did was like…magical."

"Did you guys have fun in art this year?"I ask a Kindergarten class.

"…Eh," says Michael loudly. I can barely hear the "Yeah!'s," in the background.

Smiling, I remind myself, "You can't please everyone."

Both of the sketches above describe conversations that took place during my last days

with a third grade and Kindergarten class. I present them together because I believe the dialogue

that occurs between them illustrates as accurately as possible who I am in this part of my journey

as an art educator.

In asking my students their opinions about my class, I sought to engage them in meaningful dialogue that would help me to become a better teacher. I remembered how some of my studio art and art education professors would ask for feedback on the last day of class. Though I was required to fill out teacher evaluations at the end of each semester, these informal talks seemed like they made more of an impact on my teachers. As a student, it felt good to be given the opportunity to think about what I had learned most from my teacher, what I had "gotten" most out of the class.

I clearly received a wide range of responses from the children in my third grade class, but they all spoke to the goals I had set for myself in the beginning of the year. I had wanted my students to learn more than techniques during art class; I wanted them to use their imaginations, learn about each other, and teach each other. I was by no means perfect in the classroom, least of all with this class in particular: I witnessed emotional meltdowns and religious arguments (many of which I did not know how to deal with), and left the room near tears numerous times throughout the year. However, we ended the year on a positive note despite our setbacks, and I felt successful.

Even as I wrote the second sketch, I had to laugh. Nothing is perfect, I told myself. The Kindergarten class, compared with my third grade students (who couldn't wait to talk about their favorite activities) seemed a bit less enthused. Maybe I wasn't as successful at planning lessons that my younger students perceived as "fun," or perhaps I focused less on cultivating positive relationships with my younger students than with my third graders. It is also quite possible that Michael's loud comment overshadowed the positivity that my other students expressed.

I will always be tempted to ask, "What more could I have done?" I have high expectations for my students, but even higher expectations for myself. I care because although

each mark I make is part of a larger picture, it is still mine; just as my experiences even as a child have stayed with me as an adult, the marks I make everyday have the potential to affect my students for years. However, I also know that teaching isn't a fool-proof endeavor: so far, it has been filled with triumphs and failures, at once humbling and humanizing. Not everything gets resolved, and perhaps that's alright because it is part of the process – my process.

I am not a superarteducator. I am fine with this. But even now, as I write, I think of Michael and smile. There's always next year.

5. CONCLUSION: LEARNING FROM RELATIONSHIPS

Eric, my undergraduate art professor, told me story once during class: it was late at night, and he was at a friend's house for a cookout in the backyard. All of a sudden, he and his friend heard rustling sounds. They had no idea what was causing them because it was pitch black. They had been drinking, so they did what they thought was best in the moment: they threw leftover biscuits in the direction of the noises. Of course, it made no difference where they threw the biscuits, because they had no aim, no direction. They never figured out what was making the sounds.

I remember giving Eric a puzzled look after he told me this story. In an effort to explain, he grabbed my oil paints and started squeezing them onto my plastic palette. "See? You can't finish this painting if you don't know where you're going. You have to lay out your entire palette. Don't throw biscuits in the dark."

When I began the autoethnographic process, writing periodic reflections and taking field notes, I felt like I was throwing biscuits in the dark. Just as I was unsure of what my individual marks would add up to as a teacher, I had no idea what would materialize from the words I was compiling. However, I now feel that my autoethnographic investigation has given me an incredible opportunity to not only document my first year as a teacher, but to revisit and reconstruct it as well. It has also allowed me to re-examine memories of my experiences as student of art in dialogue with my teachers and professors, forming connections between my learning and teaching that were not yet clear. As a researcher, I had to learn to "be sensitive to the qualities of meaning so that meaning may be seen" (Jeffers, 1993, p. 14), and in writing my sketches, I made sense of my experiences by looking at profound moments in my first year from a fresh perspective. While I had reacted to many of these occurrences through written journal

entries, it was beneficial for me to see the complex totality of my experiences through a new lens as I sought to better understand what happened, why it happened (from my perspective), and how I could have acted or reacted differently.

Connor (2000) states that "to define art education realistically, we must first define ourselves" (p. 9). Writing my autoethnographic sketches has been the means through which I have learned to define myself as an art educator in terms of my relationships with students and teachers. Engaging in the reflective and analytical process of autoethnography has led me to define my stance on art education as one based on fostering positive teacher-student relationships that can encourage both individuals to grow alongside each other.

In reflecting on my research questions, I believe that I have gained insight into the experiences and relationships that have contributed to my development as a novice art teacher. Before embarking on this autoethnography, I had no idea how I would come to define myself as an art educator. I was also unaware of the extent to which my past experiences had already defined me, and how my attention to these memories could help me grow and develop as an educator. However, I have come to see that my teachers and students, as well as my individual relationships with them, have had equal importance in my educational journey.

Research Question 1: **To what extent have my experiences as an art student contributed to my development as a first-year art teacher?**

I exist as an art teacher today not *in spite of* any of my past experiences, but *because of* them. Even my early school art experiences have urged me to think about the kind of art education that is worth learning and worth teaching. From these memories, I have learned that art class can easily be an enjoyable experience. Even if my teachers didn't necessarily understand my art or make efforts to understand me, I never dreaded art class and always looked forward to

having the opportunity to create *something*. I came to the art room, used the materials, and left as

the same person, changed neither for better nor for worse (at least, this was my perception). As a

teacher, I reconnected with these memories as a way of considering "whether art projects made

in schools can provide opportunities for students to truly explore personally meaningful subjects

while supporting clear learning objectives about art content" (Gude, 2013, p. 6). I saw my

elementary and middle school art experiences as a challenge to go beyond teaching children to

make "beautiful, well-crafted *thing[s]*" (London, 1992, p. 8) in order to teach art that could mean

something more to my students.

From Ms. Newton, I learned that looking at and talking about art can be

transformational. Looking at art made by the myriad cultures and individuals of the world made

me realize, for the first time, just how vast the world is, how varied our experiences. I came to

understand that there countless ways of experiencing the world, and that art could allow viewers

to see the world through the eyes of others; I began to see the potential for artworks to be "both

the windows and mirrors of our lives" (Anderson, 2003, p. 59). Ms. Newton also taught me that

passion is the most important part of teaching, that enthusiasm would not only make it easier and

more enjoyable for my students to learn, but that it would make the teaching process more

rewarding.

From Eric and Richard, I learned to look critically at my own artworks, to push myself to

create a language around my art. I discovered that dialogue was an essential part of making art,

and in speaking with them I learned how to better articulate my thoughts and concerns. Although

it was difficult for me to consider myself an "artist," I learned to look beyond the label and

engage with the art making process as an act of meaning.

When I started teaching, I wondered and worried over how I was going to bridge the gap between theory and practice. How could I possibly connect everything I had learned as a student with what and how I would teach? The answer to this question is still elusive and constantly unfolding to me. However, one thing I have learned is that my student self and my teacher self are not separate entities that I must learn to combine in some way; rather, they are interrelated and equally a part of my identity.

Research Question 2: In what ways have my interactions with students led me to think about my own experiences as a student and evaluate my stance on art education?

Remembering my interactions with my students through the writing process reminded me that meaningful relationships are born out of differentiation. Just as all of my teachers have made individual and unique marks on me and my educational experiences, so too are my students each mark makers, collectively and individually. Speaking with my students and hearing each of their voices led me to see my respective identities of teacher and learner as connected. In remembering my own experiences and seeing them in relation to my students, I was challenged to both reassert and modify my convictions when it came to teaching art. My students became my teachers, pushing me to question my assumptions, look at my teaching practice with a more critical eye, and become "wide-awake" (Greene, 1978) to the truth that I am constantly growing as a learner and teacher.

My conversations with Sarah and Denise revealed my intention to engage students in dialogue-based problem solving that would help them elaborate on their work, yet my conversation with Denise at the beginning of the year taught me that I needed to be more respectful of my students as autonomous learners (Freire, 1998). By the end of the year, I made

an effort to engage my students in more thoughtful questioning and honest critiques. As a result, I was able to make a meaningful connection with Sarah and learn more about her. In these cases I learned that "the face-to-face encounter is crucial to ethical relationships" (Grube, 2012, p. 40). My students would not learn from me if I saw them as vessels or objects. In order to make a positive mark, I would need to show an interest in my students as individual people and seek to understand them with openness and humility.

In drawing for Andrew, I missed an opportunity to help him solve a problem that was significant to him. Conversely, witnessing Noah's meltdown taught me that it was alright to modify my stance on "helping" students with their artworks. Although Noah did not learn to work through this particular issue, I am positive that he was much happier with his artwork than he would have been otherwise; I know that I felt like a better teacher than I would have if I had refused to help. In this case, my helping a student fix his artwork created a more positive experience for both of us.

Meanwhile, my conversation with Nicholas taught me that sometimes, I can teach more with silence and space than I can teach with my words. I was stubborn in insisting that Nicholas continue to work on his project, yet I did so because I firmly believe that having the capacity to work through problems, artistic and otherwise, is far more important than being able to do something "right" the first time. I learned that in the midst of questioning myself and my values, it was alright to adhere to my principles if I felt they were important.

My encounters with Andrew, Noah, and Nicholas remind me of my desire to teach art in a way that maximizes student ownership and gives students an opportunity to solve their own problems. Though the themes of these stories were similar, I handled each situation differently. Thus I am reminded that "caring is an exercise in revision. Every day offers a new opportunity to

care, just as it offers opportunities to harm, ignore, or destroy" (Phillips, 2014, p. 5). Just as I am

evolving in my journey as an educator, so too must I remember that there is not a perfect way to

interact with my students because our relationships are unique. In order to address "art that calls

us into relationship" (Gablik, 1994), I must be open to forming differentiated relationships with

my students and be receptive to ways in which we may grow together and individually.

My dialogue with Samantha made me think of what it meant to be a child in the world

and led me to reevaluate whether I was making a strong enough effort to help my students feel

empowered in my class. Reading Samantha's reflection also validated my notion that children's

voices are important in constructing a solid foundation for art education practices. After that day,

I incorporated more reflections for my students at each grade level, both formally (written) and

informally (through spoken dialogue), as a way to make more of an effort to listen to my students

and honor their experiences.

Speaking with Sam's mom reminded me that the art classroom always contains "small

stories going on within a larger story" (Grube, 2012, p. 40). In seeing over 80 students each day,

I sometimes forget that each of my students are people who have their own lives and issues that

will no doubt affect our interactions on a given day. I must be mindful of my student's unique

experiences and look for more opportunities to connect with them.

Finally, my conversations with my students on the last day of art class reminded me that

above all, my students' opinions do matter to me. The learner side of me felt nervous and

vulnerable, awaiting their judgment as if it were a final grade. However, instead of receiving a

grade from my past teachers and professors, I was receiving feedback from my new teachers, my

students, who, as we learned together, helped me figure out what was working and what wasn't,

whose enthusiasm and complaints forced me to think critically about what I felt was truly important as an art educator.

   Research Question 3: **What can novice art educators do to promote positive relationships with students?**

   After completing my first year as a teacher, I have found that student-teacher relationships are foundational to effective teaching practices. Focusing on my relationships with students allowed me to relieve the pressure I had felt as a new teacher; instead of trying to "figure it all out," I simply tried each day to make sure that my students had a positive experience in class and felt like I truly cared about them. Teaching became a much more holistic process as I tried to demonstrate care toward my students through designing open-ended projects, using a dialogue-based approach to classroom management, and making an effort to employ the knowledge gained in my graduate art education and studio courses in ways that would help my students feel empowered and successful.

   If I could go back in time and give a few words of advice to my new-teacher self, I would tell her that the relationships a teacher builds with her students can only be as strong as the relationship she has with herself. I would tell her, first and foremost, to be patient. Patience is absolutely necessary for building trusting relationships with children, but it is equally as important for educators (especially novice educators) to be patient with themselves. It is through patience that we accept the inevitability of mistakes and learn to grow from them. I visited an art teacher once who would respond to her students' laments about making a mistake by saying, "Great! Now you don't have to worry about messing up." This is such a refreshing way to consider the process of teaching, and I am sure that if I had read this statement each morning before school, I could have saved myself a lot of stress.

I would also tell my new-teacher self to pay attention. Pay attention to your students when they ask you a question. Pay attention to the things that make them excited or insecure or upset. Pay attention to yourself and the myriad emotions you will feel each day. Notice the moments in which you are annoyed and anxious, the days when you feel like nothing is going right. Better yet, notice the moments that make you feel confident, triumphant, and fulfilled. Pay attention to these things, and write them down. These records will no doubt come in handy when you want to remember and reflect on your unique story as a teacher.

Maxine Greene (1978) tells us that in order for teachers to be wide-awake, they "must commit themselves to each person's potentiality for overcoming helplessness and submergence, for looking through his or her own eyes at the shared reality" (p. 51). If we are to teach art in a way that helps our students "learn to notice the world" (Eisner, 2002), we must ourselves be open to exploring new possibilities with our students in each given moment. That includes being wide-awake to the needs and strengths of our students as they present themselves without judging or labeling them based on what we have seen thus far. It also means looking for opportunities to connect with them as people, and letting them connect with us in ways they consider meaningful.

The dialogue we engage in with our students "further requires an intense faith in humankind, faith in their power to make and remake, to create and re-create, faith in their vocation to be more fully human" (Freire, 2000, p. 91). This effort to be "more fully human" requires art educators to be wide-awake within ourselves, understanding of the fact that our past experiences will no doubt affect what we teach and how we teach. Greene (1978) asserts that "the young are most likely to be stirred to learn when they are challenged by teachers who themselves are learning, who are breaking with what they have too easily taken for granted, who are creating their own moral lives" (p. 51). We must remember that the sketches of who we are

as educators are lasting but malleable, and that "self-awareness is not a fixed state; it requires a constant reflection, questioning, and seeing in/out/back/ahead" (Mantas & Di Rezze, 2011, p. 13).

It's the summer after my first year of teaching, and I am already back at school. I have agreed to teach art at my school's summer camp, which means that most of the time I have spent reflecting on my first year has occurred while I am back in the classroom.

As I am introducing a recycled art project to a small group of younger students, I mention the fact that I brought the materials from my own apartment. Pedro, a rising first grader, looks up at me through his thick glasses. "Where is your apartment?" he lisps quietly. I smile and quickly tell him.

I continue to describe the materials I've brought when Pedro asks, "What color is it? Your apartment?"

I look at the rest of the class. They seem ready to get started; I don't' want the class to veer off-track. On the other hand, this is the first time I can remember Pedro asking me a personal question. He's trying to connect with me. Even after spending so much time thinking about the importance of my relationship with students and reflecting on my experiences with them, I don't know exactly what to do in this moment. I can address his seemingly odd question, or I can dismiss it and finish my statement. I quickly make a decision.

"Red brick," I laugh. "With a green roof."

As I reflect on the moments of my first year of teaching, I am reminded of a quote that I often say to myself as sort of a mantra: "In the mind of the beginner, there are infinite possibilities." Although I am proud of what I have learned at this point in my journey, I must

also remember that I remain unfinished. I find this empowering, for "it is our awareness of being unfinished that makes us educable" (Freire, 1998, p. 58). Reflecting on my first year and crafting my autoethnographic story has helped me to "figure out another story to live" (Ellis, 1999, p. 679) in my development as an educator and as a learner. If I can continue to see teaching and learning as lifelong processes, I relieve myself of the need to have it all figured out. I do not have to be an expert; rather I can enjoy the process, open to the opportunities that lay ahead. If I can reflect on my experiences, acknowledge and learn from my mistakes, and maintain the "capacity to renew [myself] each day" (Freire, 1985, p. 15), I can only imagine the possibilities that will continue to unfold.

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