ABSTRACT

This dissertation delves into the shifting perceptions, practices, and contradictions inherent in teaching and learning related to drawing within elementary schooling. In particular, it shares how a group of non-art specialist teachers who teach their own art and the author come to know drawing within the context of an action research group. Non-art specialist elementary teachers are increasingly responsible for teaching art to their students, a task for which few feel adequately prepared. Moreover, this group of teachers often identifies the inability to draw as a decisive factor in their lack of confidence in teaching art. The teacher-researchers reported on in this study recognized the need to return to where they had left off in their own learning of drawing as a basis for their artistic and classroom-based inquiries. Through a re-framing and demystification of our inter-relationships with pictorial realism in drawing and teaching we were able to renegotiate previous encounters that had caused stagnation and become opened up to alternative ways of understanding drawing. This dissertation articulates our research processes as an unfolding, complex, and ongoing conversation. Placing teachers at the centre of their own learning in a critically reflective and social context contributed to the transformation of perception, practice, and curricular possibility related to drawing. In this research I have not only guided, but also been guided through the contours of the roots and routes of possible change for these teachers and myself. The research experiences of the teacher-participants have resulted in a newfound and ongoing commitment to teaching art and drawing that is reasonable and risky, as well as practical and responsive to the evolving circumstances of their teaching. This seems a worthwhile (re)starting point for non-specialist teachers of art at the beginning of their careers and for those in the midst of their profession. Consequently, the dissertation is of relevance to tertiary educators and researchers seeking insights related to non-specialist teachers of art, their preparation as teachers, professional development in art, and post-modern, visual cultural approaches to art education. Furthermore, this study generates understandings that contribute to existing articulations of action research and a/r/tography.
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I am grateful for all those voices that challenged and supported my ongoing coming to understanding.
DEDICATION

This is dedicated to three particular voices that accompanied me on the journey.
CHAPTER 1  OVERVIEW

1.1  Opening Lines

Non-art specialist teachers are increasingly burdened with teaching art to their students, yet they have little training or professional development to assist their students in this undertaking. Drawing is widely used across the elementary curriculum, but it is an activity that most non-art specialist teachers feel ill trained to teach, preferring to assign drawing projects without much scaffolding. Moreover, these teachers identify as “drawing discouraged” (Ashton, 1999), tracing the establishment of this self-concept back to their own educational and life experiences. In an attempt to delve into and shift these contradictions, this dissertation examines how non-art specialist teachers who teach their own art and I come to know drawing within the context of an action research group.

The methodological underpinnings of this research are layered and incorporate action research, hermeneutics, complexity thinking (Davis & Sumara, 2006), and a/r/tography (Irwin & de Cosson, 2004) as powerful tools in understanding teachers’ knowledge and change related to teaching and learning in drawing. Action research as living inquiry offered the space and flexibility to explore reflection in action and evolving change over time. The processes of learning-in-relation through the support of challenging and sustained conversation within the action research group facilitated our pondering of alternative ways to think about the teaching and learning of drawing while interrogating and reinterpreting traditions. Our research questions evolved “as the shifting relationality found within the project inform[ed] the direction of the inquiry” (Irwin, Beer, Springgay, Grauer, Xiong, & Bickel, 2006, p. 75).

Beginning from a variety of interconnected starting points, we each progressed along our own chosen paths of study. We could not predetermine where the inquiry and conditions of our research would take us or what insights would be revealed. Through collaborating, we would together find what was possible.

In the sharing of our experience there is an openness and tentativeness (Soltis, 1993), along with risk and discovery. I was consciously aware of questioning my role and the research process in an attempt to remain open to the unknown. Complexity theorists and a/r/tographers alike “recognize the need to pay attention to tangents, to interruptions, and to unsettling conversations” (Irwin, et al., 2006, p. 75). I was compelled to reveal my knowledge as partial and evolving. Throughout the research my perceptions and assumptions about non-art specialist teachers who teach their own art, the nature of drawing, the processes of action research, unpredictability of change, and post-modern possibilities for curriculum
were reflected on. I was involved with my own change processes, just as I was committed to enabling change in the participants’ perspectives and practices. The sharing of my own artwork brings visual shape to my story and my evolving interpretive structures.

My intention in writing was not to provide answers, but to reflect a process of contemplation-in-relation. We were coming to know while working through and questioning what we brought to issues and practices connected to the teaching and learning of drawing. Our attempts to understand made for some stimulating accounts of learning and recurring themes.

This text is designed to involve readers in a complex exploration of researching, drawing, teaching, and learning. I begin by indicating the theoretical and methodological currents that run throughout the dissertation. Profiles in “encounters of learning” (Atkinson, 2006, p. 24), where understandings are problematized in conversation and through the processes of inquiry make up the body of the text. These profiles are grouped in chapters and are not presented in chronological order. Drawings created by students, teachers, and myself are interspersed throughout the dissertation. The reader will encounter a compendium of jostling fragments of individual voices that contribute something to an evolving understanding of drawing in teaching and learning. I close with a recapitulation of the areas of change undertaken in this study and a statement of emerging possibilities that this research enables.

It occurs to me that drawing without an eraser is an apt analogy to what occurred within the context of our research together. Right from the onset of this project we risked drawing without an eraser. We shared our misperceptions, revealed our changes, and integrated each other’s lines of thinking. We came to view mistakes more as insights into our thoughts, beliefs, and actions than as inaccuracies.

This tracking of process is echoed in an excerpt from our 7th meeting as a group, during which teacher-participant Richard, shared his experimenting with drawing in pen and I responded.

Richard: I am in a book group. There is a fellow who doesn’t read the book. He sketches in those permanent art pens – sharpies. I was horrified. I wanted to get out of this fear of pen. Makes you think before you mark. The new word is pen. You cannot erase and it changes your thinking. This has some errors because you cannot erase. I decided I’d do a rocking chair because it was in front of me. I never thought I'd draw a rocking chair…. I thought, “Grow up. Do a rocking chair”…. This is really hard to do. I couldn’t correct it. Like in the article [Adams, 2003], you and the paper and the object are communicating. I looked more closely…. The whole idea is you look and you see more closely…. 
Nadine: I have to applaud you. Through pen we can see, and you’ve explained, how you learned and how things changed for you. And it’s a record of that because it has not been erased. I never thought of ink drawing in that way – as a record of your learning…. You tried it this way and then this way. This shows me what you are focusing on and how we can help you….Shows me that you are conscious of certain things….

Deirdre: I love the flow.

Richard: I liked the messiness of this line.

Nadine: Drawing can be hard work and it is especially hard work when you can’t erase.

Richard: I would just turn the page over. (meeting 7)

This report of research will also unfold as a process similar to drawing without an eraser. When you draw without erasing you are tracking your in-process becoming. Mistakes may be integrated and/or just left. You can layer over a mistake and try to transform it into something else, but it is still there underneath. If you draw without an eraser and you find the resulting image satisfying, then you do not learn as much as if you are perturbed and draw again. The drawing records and re-presents your thinking at the time. Correspondingly, the reader of this dissertation will follow our mistakes, trace our thoughts, and have access to our thinking in relation to one another, texts, images, perceived realities, memories, as well as teaching, researching, and artistic practices. It will trail the group’s changes in mid-stream and evolution over time. And like a drawing, it will carry the feeling of being unfinished, still in process.
1.2 On Drawing

Throughout the history of humankind the will to draw has been insistent and ever present, its function diversifying across time and culture according to differing social and philosophical needs.

(Walker, 2002 p. 106)

Drawing is of vital importance in creating imaginative forms of visual culture and could be the means of breakthrough in this new century.


I believe it is important for people to feel able to take part in drawing and understand how it works. While drawing has been around as a means of symbolic communication since the Paleolithic era, it underpins much of our contemporary life. Most of the objects that surround us started out as drawings. We are surrounded by drawings that communicate information and ideas – traffic signs, graphics in advertising, and diagrams to help us to put together furniture. Drawing is a valuable way for us to understand and shape our world. In fact, drawing is the first form of visual communication we undertake as children, well before printing. The Greek word *Graphe* does not distinguish between drawing and writing. Marks [including drawing and writing] have particular meanings that allow us to make ideas, thoughts and feelings available to others. Moreover, drawing is a site for the appropriation, critique, creation, and disclosure of visual culture.

Acts of drawing occur all the time – someone applying eyeliner, doodling whilst on the phone, or making someone a map on the back of an envelope. We are all mark-makers. And there exists a basic compulsion to make a mark; in spite of the majority of people who, if asked, would say “I can’t draw.” We use drawing to denote ourselves by marking our presence as humans on this earth. It is the means by which we can understand, decipher, and come to terms with our surroundings as we leave marks or tracks to symbolize our being here.

Riley (2002) maintains that drawing has the capacity to make the familiar strange in its transforming of perception into social communication and cultural priorities into material form. In creating, responding to, and understanding drawing we rely on analogy (Rawson, 1979). This faculty of analogy is deployed in the processing of our experience, from the day-to-day coping with life to the remotest conceptual reasoning. Drawing as analogy allows for the layering of personal and theoretical understanding.
On the whole, drawing is the most prevalent visual art form in elementary school and in many children’s lives outside of formal schooling. One estimate is that pupils spend over 10% of their time each week engaged in drawing activities (Drawing Strategies, n.d., p. 2). Yet the number of students who hate drawing or refuse to draw does not necessarily diminish with increased occurrences of drawing. Given the frequency of drawing in elementary education and its contribution to the development of children’s competence in expressing and recovering meaning from the visual world (Eisner, 2002) it is an area worthy of further investigation.

The functions, definitions, and media associated with drawing have exploded since practices of drawing characteristic of the academy training of artists. Drawing, not unlike other media, is nested within, while existing in relation to other forms in the post-studio practice of contemporary artists where the crossing of media boundaries in order to deepen idea development is pervasive (Gude, 2007). But drawing also continues to exist on its own. Just as visual culture conceptions of art education are moving away from the study of single media toward the blurring of traditional boundaries, drawing itself has gone from being considered preparatory work or the “modus operandi for the initial evolution of visual ideas” (Walker, 2002, p. 106) for other media, such as sculpture and/or installation, to becoming many artists’ primary medium (Hastings, 2005; Sheets, 2006). This is exemplified in the resurgence of drawing within contemporary art (Dexter, 2005; Hastings, 2005; Kovats, 2005; Sheets, 2006). As Hastings (2005) states, drawing is “the antithesis to the ‘grand gesture’ in art” as well as an “act of resistance in a culture that often tends to favour the loudest and most techno-savvy. The return to drawing is part of a wider aesthetic revolution that values authenticity, intimacy and individual human striving” (n.p.). Taking my cues from the evolving position drawing holds within art education (historical and current), contemporary art, and art history, as well as the elementary classrooms with which I have become familiar, this dissertation will focus on disclosing the tensions, resistances, practices, media, and understandings of drawing that are enabled through an action research group.
1.3  Study Components

I came into my graduate studies searching for a place to dwell on some issues I could not easily resolve in my teaching. One such area was the teaching of drawing. My research career began with an investigation (Kalin, 2002, 2005) into how grade 6 students learned to draw and how they wanted to be taught drawing. Upon completion of my Master's degree, I decided that I would continue to think about drawing but that I wanted to approach the study of it from a different vantage point. Before beginning my doctoral research, I conducted a study (Kalin, 2006) that examined non-art specialist elementary art teachers' experiences with teaching and learning drawing.

I began to see connections between both of these studies. Perhaps the most significant understanding I gained was that teachers' perceptions of themselves as art educators and drawers were developed in their early experiences as students and that these perceptions (that they couldn't draw or that they knew little about art) were fiercely maintained from childhood into adulthood, colouring their teaching of drawing and beliefs about art learning. In comparing my research on experienced non-art specialist teachers of art with research examining beginning teachers (Kalin, 2006), I found little difference between how seasoned and novice educators understand teaching and learning related to drawing. The steadfastness of these perceptions led me to consider possible processes of change for non-art specialist teachers who teach their own art in my doctoral work. It is my inquiring into the possibilities for change in the teaching and learning of drawing that will be the focus of this dissertation.

1.3.1  Objectives

To investigate understanding and change one needs to provide the context for these to emerge. Action research depends on participants' curiosity about their practices and desires for improvement, thereby promoting the sharing and evolution of teachers' knowing. In order to explore the nature of teachers' understandings of learning and teaching drawing I decided that central aspects could only be addressed if I involved the participating teachers in action research on their own teaching practice.

This research is an inquiry within an inquiry, within an inquiry. As teachers conducted their own research projects, I too was researching the group's evolving understandings. Moreover, I explored my own continual becoming in relation to drawing, researching, and teaching through the methodology of a/r/tography. Within this complexity, the processes and understandings of one inquiry would feed into and intersect with the others.
The research study is prompted by the realization that drawing-for-teaching always occurs in contexts that involve others. Therefore this investigation is structured so that the participants contribute to and pull from the knowledge of the collective. Not only did the group provide a site in which to interpret past and presently experienced identities, practices, and understandings, it provided a useful resource and support group for us to continually negotiate the challenges of change and the unknowns of teaching drawing.

Each teacher-researcher established his or her own evolving research questions related to their classroom inquiries. My research questions also changed throughout the study. I started out by asking: How do non-art specialist teachers of art come to know the teaching and learning of drawing? To this I added: How do I come to know the teaching, learning, researching, and practice of drawing?

1.3.2 Participants

Convenience sampling was used to gather a group of teacher-participants for this study. I contacted the potential participants by sending each a letter of contact to their schools requesting their participation and outlining the study goals so that they did not feel under any obligations to participate. I have previously worked with all of the participants as teacher colleagues and have maintained friendships with each of them since working together. Therefore, I was familiar with where each participant taught and that they were all non-art specialists that teach their own art. After they agreed to be involved in the study, students were recruited from each classroom by requesting parental written and student verbal consent to participate in the research.

The participants (referred to by pseudonyms within this dissertation) included three elementary public school teachers, their students, and myself. Susan is a grade 6 teacher who came to elementary classroom teaching four years prior to the study from an extensive background in teaching business education within high schools and information technology in elementary school settings. Richard has decades of experience teaching at the primary level and currently teaches grade 3. Deirdre has been a teacher of upper intermediate grades (5-7) for the past decade and comes to teaching with a background in music and primary education. I chose these teachers because of their interest in seeking to inquire into their practices related to drawing, various experiences, and grade levels. During my graduate studies and prior to starting my doctoral research, I had informally discussed my areas of research with the participants and they each had shared a desire to improve their art teaching and drawing. They are all non-art specialists that teach art to their own classes within a large urban school district. Additionally, in establishing an action research group consisting of participants that might act as critical friends, these teachers were
chosen because of our history together as past colleagues. I anticipated that the number of participants in
the group was not as crucial as the possibilities for ideas to be generated, engaged in, shared, and
interrogated (Clarke, Erickson, Collins, & Phelan, 2005). A group of four participants (including myself)
would allow time and space for the interactivity of various experiences.

1.3.3 Data

Data collection involved digitally recording group conversations, two individual interviews, and
classroom teaching, written narratives, email correspondence related to the study, artifacts from
classroom practices (including students and teachers’ drawings), and photographs of students’ artwork.
Teacher participants kept visual journals that included reflective writing, drawings, collected imagery,
and reflections on shared readings (articles). Additionally, I took field notes while observing in each
teacher’s classroom and during group meetings.

The data underwent ongoing, thematic analysis (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). In the process of researching I
did not follow a linear process. Data collection, analysis, and interpretation occurred simultaneously and
interacted as I searched for understanding (St. Pierre, 1997). Data were appreciated “as stepping stones,
not facts, unchanging in themselves, on which and from which to erect an edifice, but shifting and unsure,
elements to rest briefly and lightly upon, clues to mark the path” (Mellor, 2001, p. 472).

1.3.4 Methods

This study employed action research and a collective case study design. Action research provided three
features, which facilitated the sharing of teachers’ evolving philosophical positions and practices related
to drawing. First, it required an extended timescale, within which the teachers could think about their
practices and histories with drawing. This provided a more in-depth understanding of their knowing and
becoming than a shorter process would have allowed for. Second, it permitted the teachers’ conceptions
of drawing to become apparent in other ways. The teachers frequently conveyed their epistemological
understandings through descriptions, analysis of, and reflections on the products and practices of their
teaching. Third, action research within the group embraced the relational and conversational as processes
of revelation and learning, whereby our sharing overlapped and extended each other’s perceptions and
practices.
This study was primarily interested in describing practice and personal history of teachers with the purpose of increasing understanding, rather than producing generalizations. The multiple case study design (Stake, 1995) used in this research was modeled after similar investigations concerning the knowledge and beliefs of practicing and preservice teachers in the arts (Bresler, 1993; Doyle, 1991; Galbraith, 1991; Garcia, 1993; McKean, 1999-2000, 1998-1999; Stake, Bresler, & Mabry, 1991). Furthermore, the action research groups facilitated by Irwin (Irwin, Crawford, Mastri, Aileen, Robertson, & Stephenson, 1997; Irwin, Mastri, & Robertson, 2000) wherein teachers and artists conversed and collaborated while creating art influenced the processes, composition, and possibilities of the research group described in this dissertation.

The study group gathered together for a total of 12 meetings (each lasting approximately 2.5 hours) from March to December over 10 months. These meetings convened after school in either Susan or Deirdre’s classrooms because of the convenience and centrality of their locations. The teachers each supervised student teachers in the spring and therefore, did not undertake their own teaching in art during this period. Our bi-weekly meetings were developed around a range of tasks intended to help surface some of the usually hidden assumptions that frame the teaching and learning of drawing. We discussed what we were learning, created drawings, shared artifacts from classroom activities, and read theoretical work related to the project. The topics also incorporated teachers’ values and interests connected to the teaching of drawing and their own inquiries.

Additionally, every participant was interviewed twice for up to 2 hours in a location of their choosing (either in their home or in their classroom after school). While on summer break (the study mid-point) I met with them individually to conduct interviews based on our impressions of what had occurred in the study up to that point. At the conclusion of the study, I again interviewed them individually. While the same questions were asked of each participant, I also tailored my questions to each teacher pulling from interview transcripts and examples from student work that related to each teacher’s particular experience. Moreover, I crafted questions of clarification for individual participants in response to my reviewing of notes and transcripts.

Over a 10-month period, through the use of action research, the teacher/researchers reflected on their practices in journal entries, drew, read related articles, participated in discussions during group meetings, and modified, as well as documented, their classroom activities. The research activities in each participant’s classroom were a part of the regular art curriculum, but the collection, sharing, and analysis of student drawings was part of the research project.
As a researcher involved in this process, I was also providing literature, ideas, resources, and evaluative feedback to assist the teachers in reaching their desired goals of practice. I found it was crucial for me to better understand the contexts and practices of the teacher-participants that I underwent multiple classroom observations over a four-month period starting at the midpoint of the project. It would have been beneficial to start this earlier, but each participant was mentoring student teachers during the first half of the study and these preservice teachers were in charge of teaching the art in each class. My involvement in these observations grew to include curricular consultation and collaborative teaching in conjunction with the teachers. Moreover, member checks were undertaken on my analysis of collected data allowing participants to confirm, refute, qualify, and elaborate on my interpretations.

The next section articulates the contexts out of which this research emerged. I commence with a review of action research and its links to hermeneutics, autobiography, and complexity thinking. Following this, I describe a/r/tographic inquiry.
CHAPTER 2 THEORETICAL AND METHODOLOGICAL FRAMES

The theoretical and methodological framing of this study is an interweaving of influences that approach forms of living inquiry as a web of relations between hermeneutics, action research, complexity thinking, and a/r/tography. I open with an appraisal of action research, one that is informed by hermeneutic philosophy. The intersection of these two discourses has been articulated by Sumara and Carson (1997) as yielding "an interesting and rich interpretive location" (p. xxx).

Educational action research follows a spiral method of reflection, planning, acting, observing, reflecting, replanning, and so on. This process is focused on the transformation of teaching practices. Action research tied to application in the practical is considered a limited conception of the possibilities of such inquiry. Both action research and hermeneutics involve dialogue, action, reflection, and the study of contextual circumstances. In the educational milieu, hermeneutic philosophy’s historical concentration on text is challenged to incorporate the possibilities of learning and teaching within the model of human interpretive experience (Gallagher, 1992). Hermeneutic philosophy has the potential to extend the limits of action research to offer a more complex interpretation of experience through the interrogation of the epistemological grounds of understanding and the practice of teaching. Hermeneutics in the context of action research suggests that participants remain open to the often-ambiguous relationships between knowledge, experience, and practice in the context of the situated lives of teachers.

2.1 Hermeneutic Approaches to Educational Inquiry

The hermeneutic process questions the linguistic, cultural, social, and interpretive norms and forces that frame meaning and understanding within various contexts in which we comprehend and act. The theoretical tools and interpretational strategies provided by hermeneutics (Gallagher, 1992) can be employed to interrogate the epistemological grounds of practices and understanding within a given field. Through hermeneutic inquiry while the constraints of our understanding can be exposed, there is also the possibility for expanding the frameworks of meaning and comprehension, thereby, inviting new conceptions of practice.

In education, hermeneutics is extended to notions of pedagogic action and discourse (see Atkinson, 2002) and can be used to consider the circularity of each. All practices are historically and culturally situated. In this way canonical certitude and meta-narrative interpretations can be undermined, reminding us that all
curricular artifacts are surrounded by layers of prejudice, meaning, and intention that can be exposed through hermeneutic study. Furthermore, as Doll (1993) states,

Goals and ends, those beacons that guide so many of our curricular actions, do not just appear; they are personal decisions made by cultural beings at historical moments. We need to understand the beings and the moments in order to create the curriculum. By dialoguing with texts, their creators, and ourselves, we come to a deeper, fuller understanding not only of issues but of ourselves, as personal and cultural beings. (p. 136)

When hermeneutics is considered pedagogically, teachers are required to be "interpreters of culture, rather than merely transmitters or managers" (italics from the original, Smith, 1999, p. 5). Communities of educators can collaboratively work and converse to interpret the experiences, acts, and contexts of teaching. This "dialectic of experience" (Gadamer, 1975/1994, p. 319) does not promise definite knowledge, but an active openness to experience. Otherwise, education is viewed as inert objective data to be interpreted only for its convenience and appropriateness for an individual context without dialogue.

2.2 Hermeneutically Inspired Action Research

Smits (1997) outlines how hermeneutics and action research operate within two distinct discourses and identities. Hermeneutics, a philosophical discipline that questions how interpretation and understanding are enabled, prioritizes the search for open-ended questions of meaning that resist easy solutions. In action, research questioning carries "a more immediate normative and practical import for action" (Smits, 1997, p. 281). Where hermeneutics is cautious about the use of method and technique in gaining understanding (Gadamer, 1992), action research relies on procedures such as the action reflection cycle.

While much of action research knowledge

[R]eflects understandings derived and abstracted from teaching practices, in its propositional, conceptual, and abstracted forms, it does not immediately facilitate understanding within the space of practice. In Gadamer’s terms, it is a form of knowledge alienated from that of the demands of the lifeworld. Yet it is the lifeworld that creates possibilities for interpretation and understanding. (italics from the original, Smits, 1997, p. 282)

In a hermeneutic view, understanding occurs within the lived world of human relationships and practice through the dynamic involvement of human activity and thought. Hermeneutic inquiry's surfacing of the contradictions and difficulties of lived experience while attending to the conditions that circumscribe
experience, potentially offers action research a more complex and deeper interpretation of the fullness of experiences in which practice is situated (Sumara, 1998; Sumara & Carson, 1997).

Along this line, Sumara and Carson (1997) suggest that action research be regarded as a lived practice. These lived practices – the path of inquiry and thinking that lead to research conclusions – are often omitted in the reporting of research since these conditions are not believed to be relevant to the study. The action research practices re-conceived by Sumara and Carson (1997) are “ways of living and understanding” (p. xiii) that cannot be “predetermined and established as fixed and prescriptive methods” (p. xvi). This is a call for action research to be “more holistically conceptualized and interpreted” (Sumara & Carson, 1997, p. xvii). Action research in this instance is not only something that is undertaken or done, it is “related to, yet separate from, the lives of educational practitioners, students, and communities” and is “understood as something that is inextricably tied to the complex relations that form various layers of communities” (Sumara & Carson, 1997, p. xvii). For Sumara and Carson (1997),

The question of “How does one conduct educational action research?” is thus replaced with the question “How does one conduct a life that includes the practice of educational action research?” With this question, epistemological concerns are conflated with ontological ones. Who one is becomes completely caught up in what one knows and does. This effectively eliminates the tiresome theory/practice problem that continues to surface in discussions of educational action research, for it suggests that what is thought, what is represented, what is acted upon, are all intertwined aspects of lived experience and, as such, cannot be discussed or interpreted separately. (italics from the original, p. xvii)

The researcher must go beyond reporting the methodologies followed by providing some account of how he or she has shaped and been shaped by the inquiry. Smith (1999) calls this the “dialogical journey” (p. 38) whereby the researcher has an ethical requirement to be prepared to encounter self-transformation and a deeper self-understanding through undertaking the conversational quality of hermeneutic inquiry.

The understanding generated from action research inquiry reflects knowledge about individual participants and their relations to others. This knowledge should not be considered separately from the cultural, social, historical, and political conditions under which it is produced. Herein lies the potential for action research practices to become imbued with hermeneutic and post-modern ways of knowing, especially if these practices acknowledge that self and collective interpretations “are always in a state of becoming and can never be fixed into predetermined and static categories” (Sumara & Carson, 1997, p. xviii).
Hermeneutically inspired action research "is a practice that can open to the temporality and particularity of the lives of those whom it involves" (Smits, 1997, p. 292). This is especially the case when the inquiry goes beyond mere reflective practice towards an attunement to "both the needs and possibilities for creating narratives" (Smits, 1997, p. 292) that could give shape to participants’ ongoing understandings and becomings. As Smith (1999) asserts,

To the extent that action research can contribute to solidarity, to developing spaces for conversation and dialogue in order to support the creation of narratives of self and identity, then that is indeed a living practice, one inspired by hermeneutics. (p. 293)

There are strong parallels between the cycles of action and reflection and the hermeneutic circle of going from the whole – in this case the group experience of making meaning – to parts, or individual experience, and back to the whole group experience. Through this circular understanding, a hermeneutically inspired version of action research can expose the limitations and constraints of our understanding while inviting expanded frameworks of comprehension and meaning. This is a "matter of taking up the interpretive task for oneself rather than simply receiving the delivered goods as bearing the final word" (Smith, 1999, p. 39). In this way, "action research is hermeneutic inquiry through which new understandings become possible as a result of a ‘fusion of horizons’ between the researcher’s pre-understandings and that which is new to him or her" (Kanu, 1997, p. 170). The personal interpretation of practice provides participants with agency and space to create new meanings in the midst of absolute and already defined meanings. Hermeneutically inspired action research, therefore, "is less concerned with reporting experience and more concerned with creating conditions where the experience of research generates understanding" (Sumara & Carson, 1997, p. xxx).

In a hermeneutically oriented action research, interpretation is also necessary in order to break down the "old assurances and certainties of direction" (Carson, 1992, p. 113) evident in action research’s focus on progress and practical application. Thus, the process of research deliberately repudiates the comfort of the predictable and familiar, immersing itself instead in the difficulty of the unknown and the ambiguity of the not-yet comprehended. As Sumara (1998) contends, “[i]t is this immersion in ambiguity that supports the necessary reperception and reinterpretation required for past and present experience to become reconfigured” (p. 42). Accepting that we do not know the answers or understand completely, we begin to ask the insistent questions inherent in a deeper interpretation of everyday life. “This requires an openness to our own experience and to the experience of others that causes us to put aside dogmatic arguments and preconceived opinions” (Carson, 1992, p. 113). Carson (1992) calls this a "hermeneutics of practice" (italics from the original, p. 114) where the emphasis on interpretation can reform and resist the habits of abstraction and prescription in educational research.
Hermeneutic modes of dialectical inquiry and relational understanding are congruent with the approaches currently advocated by a number of educational researchers involved in action research forms of inquiry (Carson, 1992; Kanu, 1997; Smits, 1997; Sumara & Carson, 1997). These viewpoints have stretched the limits of an action research focused on practical problem solving and prescription towards a conception of action research as a living practice inspired by hermeneutics. Hermeneutics provides a variety of theoretical tools and interpretive strategies that we can employ to interrogate the epistemological grounds of understanding and practice in the field of education. Through such interpretive inquiry, there is an interrogation into why we teach in the way we do and thus an exposure of the cultural basis of practice and understanding. The reconceptualization of action research as an interpretive process recognizes inquiry as a shared event, a dynamic conversation among dialogic participants from shifting vantage points that do not seek consensus, generalizations, or abstracted meta-strategies of instruction (Schwab, 1969). An action research informed by hermeneutics holds the potential of a more complex and deeper understanding of the ambiguous relationships between knowledge, experience, and practice in terms of the situated lives and contexts of teacher participants.

2.3 Complexity Thinking and Educational Action Research

The methodological and theoretical links between complexity theory and action research have been explored by Davis and Sumara (2005), who through the lens of “complexity thinking” view action research as a “pragmatics of transformation” that aims to “bring together the self-interests of autonomous agents into grander collective possibilities” (p. 453). Within action research we are attempting to scrutinize our partial conclusions, therefore, action research “is always and already a site for learning, and it is thus that educational action research can be wedded to the complexivist interest in the study of ‘learning systems’” (Davis & Sumara, 2005, p. 462).

In complexity thinking there is a focus on what is studied. Phenomena are studied “at their levels of emergence” (Davis & Sumara, 2005, p. 455). In complexity, processes are dependent on initial conditions, the starting points individuals come with. Any action within an open system can lead to unpredictable and different outcomes for individuals and the group. At the same time, an open system “achieves its stability by maintaining a set of relationships across change” (Doll, n.d.b., n.p.). The irreducibility and uncertainty of complex systems make reductionist analytic methods that strive for replicability insufficient ways to understand such unpredictable systems, ones that learn. Phelps and Hase (2002) claim that unlike positivistic research, action researchers have embraced the notion of unpredictability and therefore, complexity in their studies. Human systems resist prediction or control as
they continually interact with one another while learning and adapting. Complexity thinking attends to “the social collective as a coherent cognitive unity, even while acknowledging the varied agendas, diversities of opinion and unavoidable conflicts that are inevitably present in a social grouping” (Davis & Sumara, 2005, p. 459).

An action research group would be an example of a complex system that is “dynamically adaptive” or learning (Davis & Sumara, 2005, p. 456). In action research, the questioning of assumptions actively promotes disequilibrium and adaptation or change. Inherent in this adaptation is the role of reflection or “recursive reflection” (Doll, 1989) in the construction of more complex understandings and connections. This is congruent with reflexivity in action research in that both challenge “perceived irregularities in experience, with emergent behaviours based on adaptation to non-equilibrium-based contexts” (Phelps & Hase, 2002, p. 517). Furthermore, complexity “acknowledges the inability to totally understand the whole through an understanding of the parts” (Phelps & Hase, 2002, p. 514). Learning occurs between and among people and this social practice is inline with action research (Grundy, 1995).

Traditionally complexity science has concerned itself with close observation, understanding, and description of complex systems, but more recently there has been an emphasis on creating, nurturing, and affecting these systems. Conditions enabling complexity or the ongoing adaptation of systems include: “considerable redundancy among agents (to enable interactivity), some level of diversity (to enable novel responses), a means by which agents can affect one another and a distributed, decentralized control structure” (Davis & Sumara, 2005, p. 457). Redundancy wherein agents have a familiarity with the issues at hand and come with related experience along with the ability to express a diverse range of perspectives facilitate the interaction of ideas to “be knitted into more sophisticated possibilities” (Davis & Sumara, 2005, p. 460). Within “decentralized control” learning is unfolding and emergent, outcomes are not pre-stated or centrally controlled. Learning is “sustained through shared projects, not through prescribed learning objectives, linear action plans or rigid management strategies. Complexity cannot be scripted” (Davis & Sumara, 2005, p. 460). An action research group may function as an open, non-linear system, whereby control limits change and emergent learning. In action research, the researcher and co-researchers all share in the production of knowledge. The researcher is not an objective observer or manager, but collaborator.

Complexity principles have both mirrored and challenged my research practice and understanding of action research itself within the group established as a part of this study. I would describe my approach to research as one based on “complexity thinking” as a “research attitude” (Davis & Sumara, 2006, p. ix).
Action research informed by the features of complexity became the conditions through which we (re)learned from our experiences, individually while in relation. The process was inquiry driven action and learning where goals, objectives, and targets were not imposed. As I “level-jump” in my simultaneous examination of the individual teacher-researchers and the conditions of emergence I am attempting to “defy simplistic analyses and cause-effect explanations” (Davis & Sumara, 2006, p. xi). I cannot venture to say that I am always able to re-interpret non-reductively or that I have always been conscious of my modernist drive to linearity and delimitation, but I have been compelled to attend to my own assumptions and identity as researcher “in contributing to the shapes of the phenomena researched” (Davis & Sumara, 2006, p. xi).

I have further interrogated my identity as researcher in contiguity with my activities as artist and teacher while undertaking this study through an engagement with an arts-based educational research methodology referred to as a/r/tography. This additional process of living inquiry re-presented, interrupted, and extended my learning in relation to the contexts, roles, participants, and practices involved in this study. What follows is an articulation of a/r/tography and how, like action research and complexity thinking, it attempts to enable the processes of emergent and evolving change and insight.

2.4 A/r/tographic Inquiry

As Cole and Knowles (2000) argue,

Teaching is a complex, dynamic, and socially constructed activity, sometimes impulsive, not always logical, often unpredictable, frequently intuitive, and invariably difficult to describe and interpret...If we characterize teaching as a form of creative expression – characterized as multimodal, nonlinear, and multidimensional – then it makes sense to search for ways of understanding teaching that are also nonlinear, multimodal, and multidimensional. (p. 63)

Researching our perceptions, experiences, identities, practices, and beliefs as teachers through alternative, multimodal, and nontraditional forms of inquiring and representing offers multiple ways to explore and share our teaching as aspects of lived experience that are continually evolving and hold transformative potential. In particular, arts-based educational research has been recognized by many in the field of educational research as having such utility as a form of inquiry (e.g., Barone & Eisner, 1997; Bochner & Ellis, 2002; Cole & Knowles, 2000; Diamond & Mullen, 1999; Finley & Knowles, 1995). Barone (1987) describes arts-based educational research as adapting strategies and methods associated with literary criticism and the arts to describe and assess facets of education. Bochner and Ellis (2002) view art making
as not only a mode of representation, but also a mode of narrative inquiry that evokes self-understanding and attempts to express experience. Symbolic or imagistic representations hold the potential to access what otherwise might remain hidden and inexpressible.

In correspondence with other modes of arts-based educational research, a/r/tography views the production of the arts as holding potential as a method of representation and as a mode of scholarly inquiry (Springgay, Irwin, & Wilson Kind, 2005). As an arts-based educational research methodology a/r/tography (Irwin & de Cosson, 2004) “renders research inquiries through artistic means” (Irwin, 2004, p. 1). To be involved in the practice of a/r/tography “is to inquire into a phenomenon through an ongoing process of artmaking and writing while acknowledging one’s role as artist[a], researcher[r], teacher[f]” (Irwin, 2004, p. 1). Identities, practices, text, and image interconnect in the processes and representation of the research, so that these elements “speak in conversation with, in, and through” (italics from original, Springgay, Irwin, & Wilson Kind, 2005, p. 899) each another. While the arts are recognized as a way to re-search the world and enhance understanding, a/r/tography also encompasses teaching and learning as acts of inquiry (Irwin, Beer, Springgay, Grauer, Xiong, & Bickel, 2006), so that art, researching, and teaching are each “researched, represented, interpreted, and understood, in relation to the other, each intertwined and inextricably linked” (Kind, 2006, p. 53). Moreover, a/r/tography as a relational process dwells within tensioned in/between spaces, seeking out and acknowledging discomfort as a vibrant place of becoming and learning (Kind, 2006). A/r/tography does not seek to answer questions or offer a linear pattern of inquiry that culminates in conclusions, rather as a form of living inquiry questions evolve and are generated through the relational products and processes of one’s active engagement within an ongoing search for deeper understanding.

Similar to complexity thinking (Davis & Sumara, 2005) and action research as a living practice (Carson & Sumara, 1997), a/r/tography is concerned with the circumstances that challenge practices and generate knowledge instead of uncovering knowledge that is already there. Carson and Sumara (1997) state,

As all artists know, the greatest challenge to producing works that interrupt normalized ways of perceiving and understanding is to learn to perceive freshly…. Learning to perceive differently, then, requires that one engage in practices that, in some way, remove one from the comfortable habits of the familiar. (italics from original, p. xvii)

I found my way to a/r/tography in an effort to complexify my own understanding of drawing. Drawing allowed for a re/searching of my identities, practices, and understandings as relational. In this there is little familiar or certain for me as a writer, researcher, or drawer. I am on the edge of my practice(s).
When my identities and practices are kept separate, I am less fragile and frightened. When they are confronted by each other there is little comfort and much risk. My attempts to bring these complexities to light, to understand them while in the midst of one another, and to leave a trace of my experiences have been a major part of what I have been investigating.

This creating of art and the interrogation of interdisciplinarity within the action research group constituted an immersion in the conditions of a/r/tography, of relational aesthetic inquiry (Springgay, Irwin, & Wilson Kind, 2005). A/r/tography encompasses methodological concepts and conditions found within a process space that is relational, interdisciplinary, and flexible. Both the notions of a condition and concepts or renderings allow for the attending to the “process of creativity and to the means through which one inquires into an educational phenomena through artistic and aesthetic means” (italics from original, Springgay, Irwin, & Wilson Kind, 2005, p. 989). In this way, a/r/tography as a condition of relational aesthetic inquiry “becomes a passage to somewhere else” (Springgay, Irwin, & Wilson Kind, 2005, p. 909).

Possibilities for engagement and meaning making are offered through six interconnected renderings: contiguity, living inquiry, openings, metaphor/metonymy, reverberations, and excess (Springgay, Irwin & Wilson Kind, 2005). These renderings “are conditions of aesthetic discovery and inquiry, they constitute a field of study or a methodology, and they rupture evaluative processes so that living inquiry, enactment, art, and graphy cannot be separated out into criteria” (Springgay, Irwin, & Wilson Kind, 2005, p. 909). Furthermore, these concepts are woven throughout the process, practice, and text of the inquiry. They are at once the substance, shape, and process of the inquiry. These renderings are constitutive encounters and interconnections that speak in conversation with, in, and through art and text. (Kind, 2006, p. 55)

Contiguity focuses on the relationships and spaces in-between concepts such as art and graphy (or image and word), the identities of artist/researcher/teacher and the practices of teaching, researching, and art making. Attending to the shifting and dialogic spaces in-between permits dynamic living inquiry.

Similar to conceiving of action research as a living practice “[i]n a/r/tography, visual, written, and performative processes are enacted as a living practice of art making, researching, and teaching” (Springgay, Irwin, & Wilson Kind, 2005, p. 902). Visual and textual processes enable re-representations and understandings. Questions and issues permeate and interrogate our living and doing across contexts,
identities, and processes. A/r/tography as a living practice attends to “memory, identity, autobiography, reflection, meditation, story telling, interpretation, and/or representation” (Springgay, Irwin, & Wilson Kind, 2005, p. 903). For

a/r/tographers are living a life of inquiry with, in, and through their art forms, writing practices, and roles as artist, researcher, and teacher. Through this active inquiry, they are engaged with the difficulties that each practice and role brings to a particular context.

A/r/tographers use their practices and roles to make meaning, to change meaning, and to understand meaning. (Springgay, Irwin, & Wilson Kind, 2005, p. 904)

Reverberations reference the shifting, surfacing, or slippage of meanings and understanding through dynamic movement. These vibrations allow “art making/researching/teaching to sink deeply, to penetrate, and to resonate with echoes of each other” (Springgay, Irwin, & Wilson Kind, 2005, p. 906). Research so conceived “becomes an act of unsettling and being unsettled” (Kind, 2006, p. 56).

Metonymys and metaphors help us see what we currently cannot see (Doll, 1993). Within a/r/tography, [m]etonymy is a word-to-word (or image-to-word, or image-to-image) relationship, which emphasizes a displacement in the subject/object relation, such as part to whole encounters. More important, it is the movement within displacement that provides metonymy with its pulse of difference, recognizing the extent to which signifiers dislodge Others with partial, opaque representations and not only revealing meanings, events, and objects but also obscuring them in this very act. (italics from the original, Springgay, Irwin, & Wilson Kind, 2005, p. 904)

Metaphor also suggests meaning by one signifier standing in for something else. There is a process of doubling, a provocation and reconsideration of both signifiers. In both and between metaphor and metonymy meaning is made and unmade. “There is both a loss of meaning and simultaneously a realization of it, invoking the presence of what it is not, and also what it might become” (Springgay, Irwin, & Wilson Kind, 2005, p. 905). These tropes reveal relationships and perceptions as shifting, complex, and in tension.

Openings in a/r/tography permit the surfacing of what lies beneath the known and the seen. “These holes are not empty spaces needing to be filled. They are located in space and time, allowing artist/researcher/teachers to move within the research text, penetrate deeply, and shift the boundaries of perspective” (Springgay, Irwin, & Wilson Kind, 2005, p. 906). They are not to be filled up with what we
know or to be seen through clearly. These openings rupture the known with difficulty, ambiguity, and contradiction.

Excess is that which eludes discipline, boundaries, and mastery. It can be the unseen, the Other, the unnamable, and the surplus that may trigger new possibilities. Excess as an ongoing practice creates openings where regulation and control recede (Springgay, Irwin, & Wilson Kind, 2005). There is generativity in excess as the recursive, revisiting, unraveling, and re-imaging of experience allows for complexity and penetrates meaning making.

Relationality is a current that inherently flows through a/r/tography, complexity thinking, action research, and hermeneutics. I now want to turn to how we come to know in relation to Others through conversation and as critical friends within action research groups.

2.5 Coming to Know in Relation

Every mode of knowing is also a mode of being in relationship.  

(Huebner, 1985, p. 170)

Within action research groups, members are coming into presence (Biesta, 2004) while undergoing change through engaging in relational knowing. The complex network of relations that are continuously being produced in and through the research inquiry itself can generate new practices and knowledge while interrogating and reinterpreting traditions. This process of learning through relationality represents a move away from defining learning as individualistic toward perceiving knowledge as being produced through interacting relations between others.

Lather (1991b) points out “[through dialogue and reflexivity, design, data and theory emerge, with data being recognised as generated from people in a relationship” (p. 72). My familiarity with the social foundation of learning (Vygotsky, 1978; Wenger, 1998) was made strange and more complex once immersed in action research. Understandings reverberated throughout an action research group in mutually specifying, co-emergent, and dynamic ways (Davis & Sumara, 1997), “with knowledge-as-action or knowledge-as-(inter)action” (p. 110) becoming useful metaphors.
Reading Kieren's (2005) article, “A Perspective on the Idea of ‘Complicity’” further enabled me to view our coming to know in relation not so much as a cause-effect situation, but more of a ‘complicitly’ functioning system that is recursive and non-linear in nature. We were each complicit in, but did not cause the further action of the others or the collective…. While these actions and their aural results were determined by the capabilities of the individual players and group – they were codetermined by the action of the others. (Kieren, 2005, p. 73)

Pedagogic relations “can be developed between different learners, between a learner and information, and within the learner herself” (Smitherman, 2005, p. 172). While these pedagogic relations impact our perceptions, they are at once reflective of specific, personal experiences that are integrated into, while existing alongside larger cultural networks, discourses, and norms (Doll, 1993). Conversation is a process and space where these relations and perceptions can be brought into presence in the midst of others.

Relational knowing through conversation works from “a script beyond thought. It evokes past memories of stored knowledge transformed into knowing through not only cognitive, but moral, spiritual, psychological, and physical responses” (Hollingsworth, Dybdahl, & Turner Minarik, 1993, p. 10). Selves who come to know in relationship enter a hermeneutic circle as conversational participants…rather than those who have learned about, practiced, and entered a clearly articulated epistemological framework to reach some fixed, consensual goal. The conversation is a continual questioning of received wisdom through hermeneutic dialogue that contains a space for wonder, mystery, uncertainty, and the barely knowable (Beyer 1988). Such a space cannot be filled with any rigid conception of truth and knowledge or epistemology. (Hollingsworth et al., 1993, pp. 9-10)

According to Feldman (1999), because conversation is hermeneutical and dialectic it does not continue to a resolution but until the participants feel that it is time to move on; that it is time to end the conversation. Therefore, conversation is not a prelude or postscript to action. Conversation can lead to action, follow action or be a part of action. (p. 134)

Davis and Sumara (2006) maintain that neighbor interaction is a feature of complexity that emphasizes the importance of contact between agents within a system. “[T]he neighbors that must interact with one another are ideas, hunches, queries, and other manners of representation” (italics from original, p. 142). The collective dynamics of the interaction of individual interpretations opens up the possibility of the
novel and unpredictable. Here multiplicity of insight is more enabling than consensus. Understanding through conversation, therefore, may or may not be reached through agreement among participants.

2.5.1 Curriculum as Conversation

Since self and reality are relational, we must, as Richard Rorty (1980) says, "keep the conversation going" (p. 377).

(Doll, 1993, p. 62)

In conversation (whether Kauffman’s [2004] “creative conversation,” Davis’ [1996, 1997] “hermeneutical listening,” or Pinar’s [2004] “complicated conversation”), scholars propose that reciprocal relations are enabled through a balance of structure and flexibility. In research and in teaching, conversation must facilitate the sharing of ideas of students and participants, and not the sharing of the ideas of a researcher or teacher alone. “[R]elations will exemplify less the knowing teacher informing unknowing students, and more a group of individuals interacting together in the mutual exploration of relevant issues” (Doll, 1993, p. 4). At the same time, there needs to be an environment that gets people talking and questioning their perceptions, so that the researcher or teacher is more involved in listening than transmitting, with understanding through listening being the goal of dialogue. Knowledge here is grasped as transformative in that no one way is the path to truth and each perspective has the right to be heard (Doll, 2005). The identity of researcher or teacher then entails providing activities that allow for the interacting of ideas of others, the challenging and perturbing of understandings (including those of the researcher or teacher), and the continued learning of the researcher or teacher alongside participants. We must seek ways to harness and make use of this complex conversational interactivity. Tasks and topics need to be chosen based on their potential to infuse an ongoing conversation, not to reach a predetermined end point (Reeder, 2005).

The teachers in this research group needed to have a space to explore and approach the teaching of drawing in their own ways. We did not rely on a pedagogy of mimesis, wherein one way of understanding drawing was reproduced. To develop their own evolving relationships to the subject matter, my voice and my experience had to be relayed as one voice among many and one experience among a community of inquirers. Through conversation they were able to offer up their own varied understandings within a space that challenged, validated, and perturbed their thinking while assisting them, both individually and collectively, to weave together a cacophony of approaches and understandings related to drawing.
Developing space with and for their students to participate in the unfolding of curriculum as a conversation wherein knowledge emerges as meaning transforms the learning environment into a place that is focused on “that which is among them.” (Davis et al, quoted in Reeder, 2005, p. 259)

In our research group each of us were invited to be co-creators of and participants in a curriculum as conversation (Reeder, 2005).

Curriculum in this vein is imbued with Pinar’s (1975) currere, a process of dialogue, inquiry, learning, and experiential transformation while “running” the course, and less a following of a pre-set “course-to-be-run” with a set product to be mastered. Currere integrates both process and content, within which content is embedded and defined in terms of process. As Doll (2005) articulates “[a] dynamic, emergent curriculum, transformative in its processes, sees both the learner and the curriculum...having their own voice. The point-counterpoint of this duet/dialogue, with practice and over time, produces transformative results” (p. 55). Here planning is necessarily “fuzzy,” interactive, exploratory, and flexible with specificity evolving conjointly among all involved (teacher, researcher, participant, and student) (Doll, 2005).

In such a curriculum “the consequences of past actions” become “the problematic for future ones” (Doll, 1993, p. 163). This requires reflection and dialogue with oneself, others, and context (Schön, 1983). As Doll (1993) states,

Reflection is taking experience and looking at it critically, variously, publicly: that is, connecting our experiences with others’ experiences, building a network or experiences wherein past, present, and future are interrelated. Reflection steps back and examines past experiences in the light of other connections and alternatives. It is a reconstruction of actions taken; it is a re-look at meanings made. (p. 141)

2.5.2 Critical Friends in Action Research

The members of our group were previously known to each other as teaching colleagues. We had all worked together at one elementary school for three years and had maintained contact in the five years since moving to different schools. At the onset of the project, we relied on our previous and existing relationships to establish a supportive learning environment wherein group members could expose and explore their vulnerabilities in relation to drawing. We already had the mutual-trust and rapport that is an essential prerequisite to working collaboratively (Robinson, 1989). This enabled the establishing and
maintaining of an "ideal speech situation" (McCarthy, 1978), which in our context was a non-threatening ground for cooperation and the involvement of all parties.

In action research, colleagues with existing relationships can provide critical perspective, support, and challenge to the underlying assumptions within each other’s practices and beliefs. They act as “critical friends” (Costa & Kallick, 1993; Dunne, Nave, & Lewis, 2000; McNiff, Lomax, & Whitehead, 1996). Dunne and Honts (1998) have identified three stages characteristic of critical friends groups: a support stage, an improvement of classroom instruction stage, and a stage of questioning fundamental practices and purposes of education within a wider context. Groups need to establish trusting relationships as a foundation for a culture of collegiality in the first stage in order to reach the second or third stage. The group members’ abilities to develop trusting relationships and a sense of personal responsibility for the success of the group contributes to their willingness to engage in asking each other challenging questions and critically examining each other (Dunne & Honts, 1998). Dunne and Honts point out that “[i]n groups that begin with substantial pre-existing levels of trust, progress is made quickly; until high trust levels are established, it is impossible for groups to move to more complex levels of interaction” (p. 6). Franzak (2002) observed a group of critical friends that spent its entire first year focusing on community building. In the case of this study, none of us would say that we spent time community building. Trust was pre-established and this sense of community was maintained over the course of the research. The community of friends was extended during the research to enable a community of support, learning, and collaboration around the research topic (see Irwin, Crawford, Mastri, Aileen, Robertson, & Stephenson, 1997; Irwin, Mastri, & Robertson, 2000). Within this different conception of a community of friends there were overlapping roles, where we each would facilitate the reflective and learning capacity of each teacher-researcher in a cooperative and supportive manner (Kember, Ha, Lam, Lee, Ng, Yan, & Yum, 1997).

A limitation of this type of group arises when teachers restrict themselves to safe feedback or resist hearing criticism (Dunne & Honts, 1998). This dilemma reflects the view that friendship and critique exist in a dichotomous relationship. From the onset of our meetings, it was apparent that we were not only willing to be vulnerable with each other, but also to pose challenging questions and share diverse perspectives around the topic of drawing.

It occurs to me that in collaborative research groups where friendships have been established prior to or during the course of a project, a working group feels an “obligation towards and responsibility for their colleagues” (Hargreaves, 1994, p. 424) that is central for the generation and sustaining of trust among participants. In questioning, sharing different experiences, histories, and priorities related to drawing, as a
Through trust and respect we assume the integrity of the Other while we rely on the Other. This reliance becomes a mutual obligation, for “[w]hen founded on active trust, obligation implies reciprocity. Obligations are binding because they are mutual, and this is what gives them their authority” (Giddens, 1994, p. 127). In our group we had a responsibility to our own learning, but also a responsibility to the nurturing of each other’s reflexive generativity. There is a commitment to maintaining the relationships that existed prior to the start of the research project and this in turn impacts participants’ commitment to the research project itself.

Within our group we responded to each other in ways that were by-and-large nonjudgmental while challenging each other’s perspectives and offering alternative possibilities for consideration. I would recognize that my role was predominately to challenge, but also to support the other participants. Although I acknowledge that I was often viewed as expert and that this undoubtedly influenced the teachers to pay attention to my ideas, narratives, and questions, these were but one part of a mélange of other voices within the group. I think our prior and on-going relationships make it easier for us to ignore, mull over, decry, and/or take up another’s invitation to re-consider our stances.

In addition to our friendship, our shared background experiences as elementary generalist teachers provided the common ground of internal redundancy and allowed us to pull together as a robust and complex collective. This redundancy was also complemented by our internal diversity in relation to art and drawing. We varied in our purposes, definitions, practices, interpretations, understandings, interests, abilities, and experiences in teaching and learning drawing. This diversity was not suppressed or ignored but explored through joint play and interplay as issues arose and interpretive possibilities were shared. Both of these characteristics – redundancy and diversity – allowed us to work productively as a complex system. As Clarke, Erickson, Collins, & Phelan (2005) articulate “[i]nternal redundancy interacts with internal diversity so that in extreme instances of either excessive difference or excessive duplication, which are likely to inhibit rather than enhance the generative capacity of a system, are counter-balanced by each other” (pp. 165-166).

Within our group all of us might share reservations, prodding questions, or alternative understandings of a given concept or practice. This in turn often pushed each of us into different or a more complex appreciation of a topic. Whenever tensions arose, a search for understanding another’s perspective in respectful ways was attempted. This was sometimes inadvertently the catalyst for change within individuals or groups of participants.
The balance between critique and support is difficult to articulate. In a community of learners, participants are asked to share and consider their histories and understandings of particular topics. It is often through this making public and articulating that we become conscious of our perspectives. Once members relate to and/or question in various ways another’s point of view, there is a reframing and reflection that happens individually, both within the group and individually outside of the group on their own.

In this study, we came together to discuss our relationships with drawing. In this I realized we were among the ‘drawing discouraged.’ Although each of our paths to shared inquiry was unique, we found common ground in our desire to support each other while shifting our practices and perceptions of drawing. The subsequent section reviews research related to non-art specialist teachers’ relationships to art and drawing in education.

2.5.3 Among the “Drawing Discouraged”

Many elementary generalists feel that if they can’t draw, they can’t teach art. (Duncum, 1999, p. 33)

Beginning as early as they can hold a pen, a pencil or a crayon, most people mistakenly learn that they are unable to draw. This constraining mind-set prevents many from enjoying creativity that others find engaging and restricts their opportunities to see the world from a different perspective. (Grant, Langer, Falk, & Capadilupo, 2004, p. 261)

The prevalence of teachers who lack formal art education training being given the responsibility of teaching art to elementary children is increasing (Bresler, 1993; Upitis & Smithrim, 2003) in Canada. There have been research studies analyzing art teachers (Bresler, 1993; Doyle, 1991; Garcia, 1993; Grauer, 1995, 1998; Stake, Bresler, & Mabry, 1991; Stokrocki, 1997) and non-art specialist teachers’ perspectives on teaching art (Galbraith, 1991; McCoubrey, 2000; McKean, 1998-1999, 1999-2000; Smith-Shank, 1992, 1993; Upitis & Smithrim, 2003). Investigations concerning the knowledge and beliefs of practicing and preservice teachers in the arts are growing, as are studies examining non-art specialist teachers’ perspectives about art subject matter and teaching. Yet, little attention has been paid to how inservice teachers negotiate change related to teaching art. I have encountered three studies that focused on non-art specialist teachers’ change through art making. The dissertation research of both Ashton (1999), Patterson (2002), as well as a study conducted by Upitis, Smithrim, and Soren (1999) all
involved leading teachers through art making experiences over several months and shared the changes teachers underwent in their beliefs and practices. Each also delineated how teacher development in the arts involved the intermingling of pedagogical, personal, curricular, and institutional issues. My study adds to the current literature with its focus on non-art specialist teachers’ views and experiences, specifically related to drawing, and how these might undergo change in the context of an action research group.

According to Grauer (1998-1999), “[T]he content for teaching art is very much determined by the values, knowledge and expertise of the individual teacher” (p. 75). When we inquire into teachers’ pasts, we usually find some sort of experience with drawing for school or pleasure (or both) and these experiences lay the foundations for the idiosyncratic and autobiographic nature of teaching drawing (Kalin, 2006; McCoubrey, 2000; Smith-Shank, 1992, 1993). Many preservice teachers have to complete one art education course during their teacher training that provides them with formal knowledge and practice in a range of art techniques intended to adequately prepare them for the teaching of art at the elementary level. This course, practicum, school observations, teacher colleagues, museum visits, professional development workshops, along with high-school and elementary school art classes are the experiences and resources that non-art specialist teachers pull from once they begin teaching art. Nevertheless, as Paul Duncum (1999) claims,

[I]imited time devoted to art during preservice, inadequate inservice education, and competing curriculum demands, conspire to ensure that elementary generalists possess very little specialist knowledge in art. Consequently, preservice teaching of elementary generalists is sometimes considered the “black hole” of art education. No matter what pains are taken in teacher training, there appear to be few long-term gains. (pp. 33-34)

While these teachers likely lack confidence in drawing, they use drawing widely in their teaching, that is, most require their students to draw during art activities and/or across curricular areas (Ashton, 1999; Kalin, 2006).

It is crucial that these non-art specialist teachers’ viewpoints and experiences be accessed, honored, and challenged through discussion, reflection (Grauer, 1998-1999), and appropriate professional development to ensure quality art programs are implemented at the elementary level. Ignoring teachers’ beliefs and theories about subject matter, as well as the socio-cultural traditions that formed these points of view can undermine efforts toward curriculum change or innovation (Clark & Peterson, 1986).
Most of the elementary non-art specialist teachers who teach their own art I have encountered were taught by art teachers in their schooling experiences that adhered to a freedom of expression paradigm in their approaches to art education, whereby personal self-expression was valued over skill in pictorial realism. The goals of this approach might be viewed as conflicted.

On the one hand, the core self is seen as something to be nurtured, and so teachers are admonished to foster self-esteem and autonomy. On the other hand, the individual must fit into the giant machinery of society. (Davis, Sumara, & Luce-Kapler, 2000, p. 167)

The art class that attempts to foster self-esteem through self-expression might be conceived of as a fortress impenetrable by outside forces, yet youth still yearn for the ability to draw realistically (Kalin, 2002, 2005) and this yearning is reflective of larger societal conceptions of what defines drawing and drawers. Drawing for most students of art does not hold the “promise of higher artistic purpose, individual expression, or outlet for…creativity” (Ashton, 1999, p. 42). People who hold self-concepts as “non-drawers” along with most non-art specialist teachers’ of art function within a paralyzing paradigm—they don’t feel they can draw because they cannot render realistically. This phenomenon has been called ‘drawing discouragement’ in the review of a study undertaken by Ashton (1999) concerning generalist art teachers and drawing. Ashton (1999) maintains that despite the promise of uplifting outcomes, the art of drawing has never been simply a matter of making marks. If it was that simple ‘drawing discouragement’ would not exist. The desire to draw ‘well’ is in Western contexts, invariably constructed to mean ‘drawing so it looks real.’ Without exception for the participants in this study, the statement “I can’t draw” referred specifically to this representational style, in which objects are depicted with naturalistic proportions, fixed view perspective, the illusion of depth and close visual resemblance to its appearance in ‘real’ life. (p. 42)

The self-concept of “non-drawer” is a product of cultural influence and social interaction. One’s sense of self as drawer or “non-drawer” “unfolds continuously through the recursive and reiterative processes of representing and interpreting one’s identity in relation to (and in distinction from) other forms – persons, objects, events, and so on” (Davis, Sumara, & Luce-Kapler, 2000, p. 169). While post-modern perspectives on identity might view the self as fluid, contextual, and shifting, the teachers in this study had formed and maintained their “non-drawer” identities for several decades. This study explores how non-art specialist art teachers’ identities and practices related to drawing might be seen anew and taken up as open to revision. One such basis for change is through personal history, whereby individuals are brought to an increased historical consciousness about how the past colours the present.
2.6 Continually Becoming Teachers of Art

All too often approaches to teacher development are centered on the behaviorist identification of teachers’ knowledge and skills associated with instruction (Horn, 2000), whereby development programs import external, short-term, de-contextualized innovations to correct “teacher deficits” rather than celebrating the potential of teachers to define their own learning and create their own meanings” (May, 1995, p. 83). Reform and renewal of teacher education and development can promote a shift from a provider-driven to a learner-centered model and to an approach which includes the human, interpersonal, cultural, spiritual, and aesthetic dimensions of teachers’ ongoing, lifelong learning. Weber and Mitchell (1996) speculate that professional development “focuses too much on ‘overcoming’ or ‘unlearning’ past experience” and that “it may be more fruitful to work with rather than ‘undo’ prior knowledge” (p. 312). A more holistic view of professional development that seeks to study the intertwining of professional identity and practice with personal, historical, social, and contextual influences on lived experiences is enabled through the sharing and critical analysis of personal memories, experiences, and perceptions.

Our practices and identities as teachers are built from reciprocal relationships between memories, experiences, and perceptions as they interact within particular historical, cultural, and environmental contexts. We write our own scripts while enacting the identity of teacher, intertwining professional and personal histories. Art teaching is therefore a dynamic, active, creative, and living expression of the self that is ongoing.

Since knowledge is not separate from the knower (Connelly & Clandinin, 1985), what we know, how we teach, and how we understand ourselves as teachers of art are shaped at a fundamental level by our biographies (Knowles & Cole, with Presswood, 1994) and how we situate ourselves in the world. Typically, personal experiences and histories remain unexamined in the course of teacher education and development, even though our professional identities, actions, and understanding are intimately interconnected and dependent on our personal stories of the past, present, and future.

The importance of understanding the influence of personal history on teaching practice and beliefs has been acknowledged in prior literature (see Cole & Knowles, 2000; Knowles & Cole, with Presswood, 1994). Personal history exploration permits teachers to remember, recreate, and rewrite their prior experiences, thereby making known the implicit theories and values that form the basis for acts of teaching (Cole & Knowles, 2000). Reflexive inquiry enables new understanding about our day-to-day practices and it can serve as the impetus for improvement, change, or affirmation (Cole & Knowles,
2000). Through a reflexive process of making “the past usable” (Mitchell & Weber, 1999, p. 5), we develop a “deeper understanding of the relationship among past, present, and projected senses of self” (Sumara & Luce-Kapler, 1996, p. 71) and how these “continually fold into one another while an individual teaches” (p. 81). Tapping into teachers’ past illuminates how these experiences play into whom they are, inform how they teach today, and shape their future practices (Mitchell & Weber, 1999).

There are many “opportunities for transformation” within educational systems that exist in “the complex interaction between individuals’ lives and the institutional and societal contexts within which they are lived” (Cole & Knowles, 2001, p. 215). Reflexive inquiry can be used as an entry point to engage in the lived experiences of teachers and how previous experiences (artistic, educational, or other) have had impact on their current identities, beliefs, and practices. Linking prior and current life experiences while making connections between personal and professional life worlds is foundational in initial and continual professional development (Cole & Knowles, 2000; Grumet, 1992; Mitchell & Weber, 1999; Pinar, 1988, 1994). Understanding these relationships helps teachers gain insights into themselves as continually evolving professionals, transform conceptions of teaching, and facilitate new frameworks for practice. If we are to escape the automatic imprint of own personal and educational pasts, we need not only to reclaim our own histories through acts of remembrance but also to surpass them through acts of critical reflection and interpretation. The consideration of hermeneutic philosophy and a hermeneutics of conversation within this action research study allows for the surfacing and interrogation of the particular frameworks of understanding (personal, historical, and social, among them) at work in individual art teachers’ interpretations of experience and practice. Our historical frameworks, in particular, while based in past experiences, pervade the present and can limit the future.

2.7 Hovering Over the Present and the Future

Many art practices in schools pay homage to particular practices and visual forms whose embedding social context is now ‘unknowable,’ covered over by the patina of history.

(Atkinson, 2006, p. 22)

We are likely to carry out curricular programs on the basis of our collective and individual histories with drawing. In my own research with non-art specialist teachers of art (Kalin, 2006), I came to appreciate how their knowledge of the teaching of drawing is generally built along narratives, which formed early and remained strong influences on their subsequent pedagogies and conceptions of teaching drawing. Residues from the past remain with us orienting and confining our interpretive framing of experiences.
and future possibilities (Schudson, 2002). We replay, resist, and/or mobilize our histories in our actions, keeping the past alive often without conscious intention. Our interpretation of the present is dependent on our repertoire of historically constructed narratives that hinder our understanding of particular situations with complexity. Many teachers, for example, continue to view drawing through the prism and the conceptual prison of historical dichotomies and practices such as drawing as skill and/or drawing as expression.

While individual memories are personal, they are also social in that they are located within cultural practices, institutions, collectively created markers and symbols (such as language and drawing), cultural artifacts that can have pedagogical influence, and shared among groups of people with collective memories (Schudson, 2002). Our lives, practices, institutions, languages, and drawings are all carriers of memory. In this way there is continuity with the past. We carry the past with us and make it visible in our practices and actions, including the act of drawing.

All of us in the research group experienced feelings while drawing and sharing our drawings that were brought forward from the past and carried into the present (see Lifelines section of Chapter 4 in this dissertation). Our drawing systems, schemes, strategies, verbal descriptions, and processes were also cultural systems that were representations or ways of framing the act of drawing from the histories each of us carried. Drawing was a way to make our paths and our histories visible, represented, and embodied. We were demonstrating that people are in fact historical texts.

Practices in the teaching of drawing also bring to the surface the nature of our presuppositions within historical experiences. The way we teach drawing can be based on an unconscious commitment to how we think we should teach drawing and think about drawing which are largely based on our pasts. So too past initiatives and movements in art education reveal values, ideals, and presuppositions. The teachers in this study and myself had limited, and perhaps necessarily incomplete (Schudson, 2002) understandings of how our pasts with art education were part of larger movements in art education. There was a certain amount of knowing concerning how our personal experiences were reflective of particular ways of teaching and understanding art in general, but these were more or less de-contextualized from the history of art education. Through examining how our current practices, identities, and perceptions of art education are nested in and originate from the past, we can reconstruct and reconstitute our present.

Coming to a more self-conscious understanding of how we frame the present through an enduring past as well as an increased appreciation of some of the historical framing within art education has the potential
to reconstruct our continuity with the past. Mapping the historical narratives circulating in the intellectual landscape of elementary education today would also make it possible for us to enter the narrative conflicts, even struggles, that are going on over the articulation of the past, the present, and the future related to the teaching of drawing. Through a critical examination of our working narratives we may reopen our understanding of the past and the present, while opting for other possible narratives to apprehend our world. This individual consciousness or coming to understand ourselves as historical beings helps us to better reflect on how the present, future, and past interfere with each other. If this comes about in relation to others there is the further possibility to explore how our narratives intertwine. Undertaking this task would make it possible to penetrate into the historical construction of collective narratives that are at the heart of modernist and pre-modernist values that continue to persist in elementary art education today, thereby making way for the possibility of liberating us within the future. Let us begin then by contextualizing some of our inherited framing of drawing by reviewing its place in the history of art education.

...the past illuminates the present....

(Wygant, 1993, p. 198)

Quite accurately, we can say that our past lives on in the present.

(Efland, 1995, p. 29)

Histories of art education have had such a pervasive and long-lasting effect on current practices and conceptions that to envision new proposals for the field without understanding previous visions and contexts would be fruitless. Indeed, both Gude (2007) and Atkinson (2006) maintain that the teaching of art in schools today is a hybrid practice that is often insulated from contemporary practices and priorities found in the art world.

Typical art courses today include the teaching of observational and perspective drawing (modeled on academic practices), teaching color theory and principles of design (based on modernist curriculum), and teaching crafts and media (based on various traditional forms). (Gude, 2007, p. 11)

Wygant (1993) asserts that issues in art education are enduring problems that may be transformed within changing conditions, but are never resolved. These issues or ideas are constructed and altered in response to how the field of art education balances the needs of society, the individual, with the potential of the subject of art. In art education notions concerning curricular content rise up, are disputed, modified, revisited, lay dormant, and/or remain untouched by change. It therefore behooves us to look to the
historical roots of our contemporary beliefs—"the historicity of basic assumptions" (Doll, 1993, p. 62)—in an effort to trace how conventions and discourses underpin our curricular priorities and position us as teachers. As we look to the past we can interpret previous values and insights against a different set of conditions than we find ourselves collectively and individually confronted with today. Many of our current dilemmas and priorities mirror concerns of past art educators. In what follows I present an historical outline of movements in the field of art education that impact on current practices in teaching drawing. It is necessarily an incomplete history setting an historical context in which to situate antecedent influences, resistances, and conceptualizations of drawing in relation to the teacher-participants in this study.

Since before the Renaissance, artists apprenticed in studios by copying works collected and or created by master artists. With the beginning of the nineteenth century, the art academy took over the training of potential artists in Europe. Students in this context learned “how previous artists had mastered the human figure…. Students first copied two-dimensional engravings; later they drew from three-dimensional plaster casts. When the student was judged competent, he was allowed to draw from life” (Stankiewicz, 2001, pp. 2-3). This traditional academic instruction was translated in Britain into the development of an art education whose foundations were based on drawing in elementary schools. The “South Kensington” approach to industrial drawing and design education, emerging after the “Great Exhibition” of 1851, valued technical drawing for its utility in British industry and trade (Chalmers, 1998, 2000; Freedman, 1987). With this initiative, drawing was democratized with everyone, not just professional artists, being taught how to draw. Walter Smith provided a graded and sequential system of instruction in copy and freehand drawing that classroom teachers used to teach students. This “art for industry” approach traveled from Britain into North American schools. Manual dexterity and hand eye coordination were taught through disciplined and reproductive drawing. Imitation, memorization, and copying were the preferred modes of learning with conformity being prized over independence.

Responding to progressive social reform and artistic modernism, in the early first half of the twentieth century “John Gadsby Chapman’s earlier motto that anyone could learn to draw, was being transformed into the slogan of Progressive educators that all children are creative” (Stankiewicz, 2001, p. 19). With Rugg and Shumaker’s (1928) child-centered approach, the new art method of creative self-expression in response to subjects of personal interest to children took hold inline with the Progressive Education Movement. Drawing transitioned from a rule-governed skill acquired through a graded series of exercises and direct instruction to a “medium for the expression of thought, imagination, and feeling” (Wygant, 1993, p. 14) that was enabled through encouragement and guidance on the part of the teacher. In their
efforts to preserve free expression, many Progressive educators all but ignored “the possibility that desire for technical skill might be a real need” (Stankiewicz, 2001, p. 38).

Concurrently, Arthur Wesley Dow’s (1899/1913) design and colour theories based on the analysis of visual forms and comparisons with music became significant. Dow introduced an art curriculum based on what he believed were universal elements of beauty and artistic values that was to replace western academic realism’s concentration on the mastery of representational drawing and imitation of material reality. Efland (1995) claims that Dow’s formalism, that works of art are composed of universal elements and principles, “advocated an art without representational content or social messages” (p. 26).

A child-centred orientation to art education continued to develop between the wars and after. Inspired by Bauhaus theories (Phelan, 1981) and Abstract Expressionism, teachers provided students with a variety of media and tools to intuitively explore their formal, tactile, and expressive possibilities. Uniformity and repression were replaced with spontaneity and freedom. This gave way in the 1950s (often known as the “Lowenfeld era” because of his influential book Creative and Mental Growth, first published in 1947) to an emphasis on the immediate needs of the young “combining therapy with children’s development in art” (Wygant, 1993, p. 113). Art allowed for expression and this would in turn assist personal (and social) well-being.

Efland (1976) claims a child-centred, creative expression approach was readily adopted because it made few professional demands on the teacher. Teachers did not have to know much art to teach it! They had only to follow Cizek when he said of his method “All I do is take the lid off, when most teachers clamp it on” (McDonald, 1971). The fact that artistic competence seemed not to be a prerequisite enhanced the popularity of the method, because the school could have a liberal, humane, and creative art program without adequately trained teachers. (p. 43)

While this “laissez-faire” approach was critiqued as ineffective, sacrificing aesthetic quality, depth of learning, fundamental skills, and direct instruction for an emphasis on novelty in media exploration and creativity (Wygant, 1993), self-expression and formalism remained (or remain) powerful directions within art education for decades.

In the 1980s a rationale for art education began to evolve that aimed to combat “the weaknesses of the ideology of laissez-faire self-expression” (Stankiewicz, 2001, p. 41) and what was perceived as the marginalization of art to recreation. Art was structured into four art disciplines – art history, art criticism,
aesthetics, and art production. Within Discipline-Based Art Education (DBAE) (Greer, 1992) students were trained in the specific knowledge, discourses, and practices of each discipline through the exploration of artistic exemplars from throughout art history.

Overlapping with DBAE was the multi-cultural art education movement that “has among its roots the civil rights movement, concepts and practices in general education, an anthropological awareness of other cultures, and a knowledge and appreciation of the art created by other societies” (Neperud, 1995, p. 15). Art education was beginning to recognize and integrate works, practices, aesthetics, and histories from across various art worlds. This focus was further developed into the possibilities for art as a cultural agent through social action and social reconstruction.

Most recently post-modernism and visual culture orientations to art education further challenge traditional and western definitions, aesthetics, and processes of art. Visual culture art education (Freedman, 2003) maintains that students should undertake the critical and semiotic interpretation and production of popular culture, outsider art, mass media, traditional fine arts, and material culture of art worlds. Post-modernism complements these objectives by framing “artworks within socioeconomic, political, and cultural contexts while acknowledging the limitations of subjective knowledge, the validity of historical appropriation, eclectic styles, and multiple interpretations” (Stankiewicz, 2001, p. 30). This most recent framing is one I am very familiar with and it was through my perceptions of a post-modern lens that I approached the parameters of this study.
CHAPTER 3 DRAWING NOW (AND THEN)

Clearly, in art drawing is big these days.  
(Wren, 2006, p. 21)

Early in my art-teaching career I encountered a grade 7 student who whenever presented with a specific drawing activity, such as depicting a still life or drawing outdoors, would always draw the same thing. He drew basic stick men with guns that he freely described as warring soldiers he witnessed growing up as a refugee during a civil war in his home country. Despite his lack of English language skills and my attempts to encourage him to draw what I wanted him to, this student lit up whenever I came close to his off-topic drawings. Early on I decided to share these images with the appropriate school personnel and was hopeful that at best my calling attention to this student’s drawings might start a healing dialogue around his life experiences. Beyond this intervention, I initially shrugged off his representations as him simply not being able or unwilling to get what drawing in art class was all about.

Nevertheless, my interactions with this student and his drawings have stuck with me. I slowly began to realize that it was I, not him, who was not getting it. My conceptions of drawing as a way to realistically render the observed world, did not permit other uses and possibilities provided by drawing to represent bigger questions and issues pertinent to students’ lives and experiences. Drawing did matter to this student, despite my perplexity, he was finding ways for the medium to work for his purposes, not mine. Drawing meant communicating to him, communicating what was experienced, important, tragic, secret, feared, and not yet overcome. It was intimately part of him. It was not obscure or removed, distanced or controlled. His marks meant. Drawing had little to do with masterful depictions of reality, with line, shading, and tone skillfully used to mirror a fixed reality. But that was what it meant to me. Through contrasting what drawing meant to each of us, this grade 7 student and myself, I became more conscious of the limitations of my approach and beliefs.

This encounter, among others over the past decade, have spurred an ongoing re-evaluation and disruption of my priorities in teaching drawing and what I came to view as my valorization of perceptual drawing from nature at the expense of drawing from culture (Petherbridge, 2005). I started to question why drawing inline with pictorial realism was so important to me. This began a continued unraveling of my beliefs and values in relation to art and teaching that had originated during my own art education in elementary, high school, and university. It was instilled in me during my K-12 experiences as a student
and during teacher training that skill in observation drawing was foundational and a key goal for art educators. According to Petherbridge (2005) this basic ideological construct originates from the eighteenth-century European Realist movement where the message “nature is purer than culture, and therefore drawing what one sees, with reliance on the accuracy of eye and hand, is somehow more virtuous than adapting from pre-existing models” (p. 129). But once I enacted these values in the context of my own classrooms, where students used drawing for purposes beyond realism, drawing became and continues to be a messy and complicated endeavour for me as a teacher, researcher, and artist. My foundations came unhinged to initiate openings for change that encompassed more of my students’ priorities amidst an evolving, more contemporary orientation to the teaching of drawing. Visual culture and post-modern art practices and pedagogy have further enabled my own re-thinking of why drawing is or could be of value. This re-envisioning of my art teaching and practice now encompasses students’ own visual culture and experience, while permitting students to use drawing to talk back to and question historical, social, and cultural views, issues, and norms.

With my narrative as a backdrop, what follows is an exploration of how the teaching of drawing might be re-articulated within contemporary conceptions of art education that embrace post-modern and visual culture pedagogies. I borrow from an array of recent curricular and pedagogic programs that have made use of drawing while concurrently questioning definitions, functions, parameters, contexts, perceptions, foundations, and potentialities within the teaching of drawing. As I summarize some of the alternative practices and ongoing assessments around what drawing could be within post-modern and visual culture art education I recognize the influence of contemporary art practices and call for the mingling of boundaries amongst traditional artistic media, sites of learning, as well as categories of art.

3.1 Definitions of Drawing

The broad working definition of drawing that has been adopted by many within the contemporary art world is mark making or a trace that has meaning. Raney (2001) points out the need for drawing to be “studied in terms of its functions, rather than having a pride of place in a hierarchy of representation” (p. 5). Drawing can be understood as a mode of external and internal communication of meanings with others and oneself. It has the ability to translate between outer and inner worlds, between artworks and recovered meanings, between physical form and idea (Raney, 2001). Drawing can function as an act of fiction, communication, pleasure, play, critical reflection, narration, subversion, assimilation, notation, representation, problem-solving, brainstorming, appropriation, autobiography, analysis, resistance of mass media, and concept development (Augaitis, 2003; Raney, 2001). These expanding conceptions of
drawings' function coupled with a re-orientated art education allow for multiple possibilities for the teaching of drawing.

3.2 Re-Orienting Art Education

Art educators are being encouraged to reconceptualize curriculum within more post-modern, visual culture, and contemporary art perspectives (Freedman, 2003; Herrmann, 2005; Neperud, 1995). As Freedman asserts "This project has become critical as societies and cultures leave the secure thinking of modernistic forms of education where knowledge is represented as stable and curriculum theorists point out that curriculum is not a neutral enterprise" (p. 108). One such departure from modernist priorities requires a re-orientation around studio practices and production. The aim of creating novel forms has been supplemented by a focus on producing works that critically and meaningfully interpret our world.

Students not only need to understand that art making is about the creative transformation of media, but that it is also about the deconstruction, reconfiguration, and transformation of ideas (Herrmann, 2005). As in contemporary art, the practices of research, communication, and investigation, rather than technical skill acquisition should drive curriculum in art classrooms. Post-modern art education appeals for constant reflecting on how the function, meaning, and content of art are situated in historical and social contexts. Neperud (1995) calls on educators to "intentionally recognize and accommodate both traditions and change in a new reconstruction through recognizing and engaging students in a search for meaning" (p. 20). This "new reconstruction" of art education has further implications for the teaching of drawing.

In the tradition of the canons of western art, drawing has held a privileged position in art practice and education being considered a foundational studio skill in the visual arts. Within the post-modern age, the status of drawing appears uncertain. It has been branded "Eurocentric" (Raney, 2001, p. 3), trivialized in the face of concept-driven or issue led approaches to art making, as well as marginalized by the increasing domination of digital technologies and non-traditional media (Montgomery-Whicher, 2001). Movements in contemporary art education have invited a reassessment of the pedagogical significance of drawing.

Although persistent, the concept of a foundation of drawing skills is no longer regarded as the only prerequisite for artistic development. Students do not need to master western methodologies for artistic verisimilitude before they can explore contemporary art practices. Moreover, in this post-modern period, nothing can be considered truly foundational (Gude, 2000). Instead, as Gude (2000) suggests, a guiding principle for contemporary art education could be the investigation of "questions linking visual and social issues. Many interesting art projects mimic our best contemporary art in that both encourage the
reconsideration of ‘the real,’ ‘the natural,’ and ‘the normal’ - and recognition that these are socially constructed” (p. 77). Similarly, Freedman (2003) proposes that curriculum and courses in art education focusing on a single medium such as drawing must give way to a more thematic curriculum that is concept or issue-based that can “enrich student learning of visual culture better than single media-based courses” (p. 119). Studio art activities are now integrating with art history, aesthetics, socio-cultural issues, and multicultural studies. Skill in any medium has “become a means rather than an end” (Herrmann, 2005, p. 42). Out of this context emerges the question: How might drawing persist within these parameters?

Whenever an art activity is planned decisions are made concerning what are fitting subjects, techniques, and materials for artistic inquiry. These decisions are never value-free (Gude, 2000). Indeed, as Petherbridge (2005) states, “[T]he appropriation of techniques and material strategies outside of a critique of their ideological embedding…continues to promote the deadly schism between idea and making” (p. 129). Gude (2000) suggests that teachers attempt to contextualize their curricular choices within personal, historical, and cultural settings, while simultaneously expanding their choices to include other points of view related to content, theme, purpose, or technique. By exposing students to artists and practices for imaging space, humans, and representing their experiences that are not based solely on visual realism and traditional European linear perspective, we can ease the tensions experienced in attempting to create a mirror image of our world or holding up student artwork against realism as the dominant criteria of quality in art. Drawing can do more than build skills in seeing, analyzing, and manipulating forms, techniques, and materials inline with traditional canonic methods. Through contextualizing curricular choices, we help expand fixed notions held by both educators and students of what drawing has been, is currently, and could become in the future.

3.3 Exploring Social and Cultural Worlds through Comic Art

An art activity that can encompass a great variety of functions, processes, and products related to drawing is comic art. Contemporary comic art is characterized by issue-based content, narrative, and borrowed or reproduced imagery (Adams, 2000). Not all comic artists draw in a highly realistic style. Indeed, “Some of the best contemporary comic artists draw in a primitive and honest style more related to folk art, children’s art, or what is variously called Art Brut or Outsider Art” (Gude, n.d).

Comic art projects challenge traditional divisions between high and popular art while commenting on the societies and cultures that engendered them. There is now in this post-modern era more receptivity to the
arts of popular culture, outsider, and non-western origin. Efland, Freedman, and Stuhr (1996) state, “[t]he inclusion of these types of art may be described as a general tendency to democratize the curriculum and a move away from a preoccupation with elitist conceptions of art” (p. 112). The singular concentration on the study of masterpieces has been supplemented by the study of visual culture in a search for social significance and meaning (Wilson, 2003).

Comic or graphic novels and the narratives expressed through them have been characterized by Brent Wilson (2003) as “massive intertextual compilations of the character types, plots, topics, conventional grammars, styles and themes of comics, movies, television, video games, and other forms of popular visual culture” (p. 118). They allow students to act as bricoleurs extending, combining, and relying on a variety of sources for their textual/visual narratives, parodies, and fantastical interpretations of contemporary culture. Employing popular cultural sources in drawing can be a powerful process by which students can explore meaning along with social and ideological critique. Re-created or re-contextualized colouring book pages are cropping up in current art (see works by Glenn Ligon and Colin Quashie) and in art curriculum (Gude, 2007) as well and these too take on social issues within a familiar form.

3.4 The Home / School Art Dialectic

Another example of the democratization of art characteristic of post-modernism is evident in calls for greater interchange between art learning that occurs in formal and informal learning environments. In reference to a case study of the student J. C. Holz and experiences in classrooms in Japan, Taiwan, and elsewhere, Wilson (1974, 2003, 2005) has outlined three sites for visual cultural pedagogy where learning and teaching are performed including: (1) the informal spaces beyond the classroom where students create self-initiated drawings or visual cultural texts; (2) the art classroom inside schools where students’ art making is characterised as teacher-directed; and (3) the space between these two previous sites. Teachers need a deepened understanding of these different sites “in order to build an ideal learning environment for students in today’s visual culture” (Wilson, 2003, p. 107). Wilson (2004, 2005) recommends assigning free drawing as homework and encouraging students to bring in their self-initiated drawings from home to place on display. Through recognition and support, teachers can legitimize the first pedagogical site while enabling a dialectic between out-of school and in-school visual cultures where influences and interests from each site can blend, connect, and extend the other within the third pedagogical site (Wilson, 2003, 2004).
3.5 Collaborative Drawing

Within post-modernism, it is argued that the valorization of the isolated artist as creator of purely authentic, original artwork has lost some of its relevancy (Clark, 1996). Most art education curriculum sends the message that art created by individual artists is most worth teaching, requiring students to work on individual projects silently and alone, while all but ignoring the study of collaborative practices in art making (Gude, 2000). In reality, all artists are creating within systems of meaning that are historically conditioned and socially produced. Post-modern informed drawing programs that acknowledge popular culture’s influence, value an interchange between contexts of art learning, and implement collaborative drawing processes all advance the dismantling of the prevailing notion of the artist as individual genius. The recent revival of “Exquisite Corpse” drawings (Philbrick, 1993), drawings passed on by mail for different artists to complete, online drawing groups, and online public drawing machines are reflective of this trend towards collaboration.

3.6 Changing Tools and Converging Media

Freedman (2003) warns, “We must be wary of curriculum that focuses on the technical aspects of art” (p. 109). Art curriculum should nurture the crossing of traditional boundaries based on single media processes and techniques. As contemporary artists do not tend to work in one production area, students too must “simultaneously be helped to deepen their ideas as they develop their media skills and these ideas may need to cross media in their development” (Freedman, 2003, p. 119). There is less of a focus on developing advanced skills in one medium and more of an emphasis on the shifting, dissolving, and indwelling between traditional boundaries of media. Just as Szekely (2000) creatively endeavours to open up his students’ perceptions of painting in order to facilitate innovation in this medium through using a variety of media to discover, seek, question, investigate, and challenge the limits of painting, the confines of drawing are also being expanded.

The Big Draw (Adams, 2002) is an annual event since 2000 celebrating drawing in Britain that also takes strides towards breaking the traditional view of drawing as simply involving paper and pencil. During this week, drop-in drawing activities are organized for the public at an assortment of venues all over the country including railway stations, museums, beaches, art galleries, hospitals, public squares, botanical gardens, and various historical sites. Drawing is undertaken with unicycles, dancers’ feet, drawing implements attached to long sticks or goggles, fingers through dirt, thread, tape, wool, wire, seeds, ink, sand, clay, dust, and fabric. Participants have had the opportunity to draw on floors, walls, bodies,
balloons, windows, shirts, plates, plexiglass, and on the sides of dirty trucks. The diversity of contexts, materials, and activities of this event reflect a revitalization and reconsideration of drawing on an unprecedented scale.

These expanding media, contexts, and processes of drawing parallel Kindler (1999, 2007) and Kind’s (2005) embracing of art making as a range of “repertoires” (Kindler, 1999, p. 331), “representational performances” (Wilson Kind, 2005, p. 13), or compositions (Kindler, 2007) across a range of modalities, not just the visual. The creation of art for children “is an engaging, embodied, sensory, sensual, tactile, kinesthetic, communicative, culturally negotiated, private and social endeavor. It also is an act or performance that changes according to the context and meanings attached to the art-making act” (Wilson Kind, 2005, p. 13). The visual image is only a trace of this activity through a variety of modes. Moreover, when drawings are enacted and created in movement, when a visual image is performed (Kindler, 1999) even without a residue, children “become the art” (Wilson Kind, 2005, p. 16).

Kindler and Darras (1997) point out that “much of children’s productions cross the boundaries of a single medium and embrace visual, vocal, and gestural elements in the creation of a piece” (p. 22). Kindler (1999) presents examples of some of the pictorial repertoires including the integration of various sensory modalities that she observed her son, Antoni, use in order to fit his specific artistic needs. Kindler distinguishes Antoni’s art, created under a naturalistic setting (at home), from typical school art or child art that often fails to encourage the invention or adoption of these alternative modalities of expression and drawing systems that can best suit particular purposes that children have in creating. Parsons (1998) concurs with Kindler when he asserts, “[d]rawing is not initially a matter of purely visual cognition, and if it later becomes so it is because of the cultural influences the child is subject to” (p. 89). Teachers need to validate a range of spontaneously emerging repertoires, including those that do not fit the image of creative child art, but that have value for children. By teachers embracing diverse approaches to drawing, media exploration, investigation of different styles, and informal as well as nontraditional contexts students can better appreciate that realism is not the only goal of drawing and these efforts might also sustain children’s interests in drawing.

3.7 Drawing’s Place

Once-solid artistic foundations have been thrown into flux, thereby enabling openings for new connections, permeable boundaries, and unfamiliar possibilities. Interaction among media, categories of art, students, teachers and students, and sites for learning can begin to infuse more modernist and pre-
modernist priorities in drawing commonly perceived to be originality, the narrow canons of western art, and a preoccupation with traditional media. Expanded notions of the resources, outcomes, contexts, definitions, subjects, processes, and potentialities for drawing within a post-modern, visual culture informed art education are ongoing. My argument for a broadened conceptualization of drawing within art curricula is predicated on the idea that art education in the 21st century should be in dialogue with the practices and debates within post-modernism and contemporary art. I do believe that there is a place for drawing within this dialogue.

3.8  Now, Then

In part the preceding articulates the lenses through which I approached the teaching of drawing prior to embarking on the research project described herein. These initial priorities, not unlike the narrative from my grade 7 classroom shared in the opening of this section, were suppressed, maintained, ignored, revealed, bypassed, and continually perturbed through my participation in the project. My evolving views were confronted, disregarded, embraced, and mirrored by the other teacher/researchers’ priorities and practices. In the ensuing chapters I share how our perspectives underwent conflicts, surprises, unraveling, and convergences as we learned from each other, participating students, and ourselves. Moreover, I share the unforeseen ways the teachers within this study complexified my understanding of the possibilities of drawing within a post-modern informed art curriculum. First though, I will explore the notion of post-modern curriculum development a little further.

3.9  Many Roads

_Nadine: Would you still want a course of study?_

_Deirdre: I wouldn’t mind something I could pick and choose from…. (2nd interview)_

_There are many roads that lead to Rome. Don’t be discouraged by someone who thinks they have the truth._

_(Eisner, 2006, n.p.)_

As Doll (1993) states, in a post-modern era

[w]hat we do – we must do – we do with the realization that it may be wrong; no longer do we have the feeling of certainty and rightness in the universal and metaphysical sense the modernists posited. Such an absolute right (or truth) does not exist. Instead we make
particular decisions which we hope will be right for now, for a local time and place. (p. 60)

This loss of certainty in the "one best" way accepts the indeterminacy of complexity while valuing multiple perspectives.

Our contemporary era of art education echoes this indeterminacy. Neperud (1995) claims we are no longer supplied with "universal 'truths' that once provided stability in teaching about art" (p. 1). Art content in this context "is less likely to be accepted as directly given by experts" (Neperud, 1995, p. 9) and "more apt to be socially constructed by teachers and students; knowledge is not accepted as given, but is interpreted according to student and teacher needs" (p. 9). Initiatives that deify a singular approach run counter to this view of post-modern curriculum development. Similarly, in our current context, pluralistic notions of art abound. If post-modern educators are called to view knowledge as partial, value-laden, and contested (Huebner, 1996), then an art education that mirrors the complex and evolving world of art and art knowledge could be our goal.

Post-modernism is characterized by a distrust of metanarratives or frameworks and an endorsement of indeterminacy, heterogeneity, difference, particularity, and fragmentation. But this is not a total rejection of, for example, modernism; there remains a tension between the new and the old (Reeder, 2005). For Doll (1993), "the past will not disappear but will be reframed continually in the light of an ongoing, changing present" (p. 157). Therefore the post-modern is "double-coded" (Jencks, 1987) "indicating a present entwined with its past and future" (Doll, 1993, p. 8). Post-modernism is not an either/or endeavor – a choice between the old or the new, but a shift toward a both/and frame – both the old and the new.

Post-modernism is eclectic in its assimilation of styles and values (Gablik, 1984) from past art forms as well as popular culture. The eclecticism includes not only recycled imagery but also theory. Here "no single theory from the past could be taken as true theory but could be viewed as provisional explanations regarding the nature of art and its value" (Efland, 1995, p. 38). It follows then that a post-modern, eclectic approach to the development of an art curriculum is mandated, even though this invites contradiction and inconsistency. A non-eclectic curriculum is possible only when one model of art teaching is privileged as being true, a situation that cannot exist as long as the present pluralism is characteristic of the art world. (Efland, 1995, p. 38)

Arthur Efland (1995) questions if an art curriculum that embraces this conflicting diversity and its social and historical bases could be considered eclectic at all since "it would simply represent the state of art at the present time" (p. 39) wherein people adhere to radically varied beliefs about art.
The curriculum may well have contradictory contents but it is constrained by the requirement to present these views with deference to their development in history. History serves as a control on a random or naïve eclecticism. Eclecticism is not a value in itself but is invoked to enable the learner to understand what it means to live and work with contending concepts. (Efland, 1995, p. 38)

In this plundering, we are, in part, confronting “the notion that artistic progress is a function of stylistic transformations, each of which nullifies past artistic endeavors – the incessant demand for newness, originality, and novelty” (Efland, 1995, p. 37). This notion of progress could also frame the history of art education as a series of improvements signaled by changes that hold the promise of “a more correct fit to some ideal” (Hamblen, 1995, p. 44), towards a correction of the inadequacies of previous initiatives that are viewed as adequate only for their time period. This modernist perspective, that the new improves and conquers the past in a grand, optimistic linear progression of improvement, still greets programs created in the present.

While visual culture theory in art education claims to “not designate pre-conceived notions of what is good, appropriate, or useful in art or other cultural phenomenon” (Gude, 2007, p. 13) it has been taken up as a reaction against modernism. As Eisner (2006) advises the “demeaning of modernism as ‘problem child’” (n.p.) may not be in the best interest of the populations served by art education. I take this to be a revelation about the fixed parameters of a visual culture approach to art education that views a dialogue with selected traditions as irrelevant. There is a warning here to not deify yet another movement as universal truth.

Without a single model, each teacher is a curriculum creator, not just an implementer, in his or her continual “reframing” of the past within the present (Doll, 1993). Teachers are “regarded as legitimate interpreters, as well as creators and translators, of art instructional content; they are no longer the medium through which information created by others passes” (Neperud, 1995, p. 10). Within a post-modern framework we are intermixing and selecting from traditions that make the most sense for our current contexts. It then follows that, as Doll (1993) articulates,

   Educationally, we need to be trained in the art of creating and choosing, not just in ordering and following. Much of our curriculum to date has trained us to be passive receivers of preordained “truths,” not active creators of knowledge. (p. 8)
Doll and Jencks use of the hyphen in post-modern symbolizes the ties and tensions between the modern and the post-modern. How these connections are manifested “in specific, local curricula is a task for each teacher, school, and curriculum developer to decide” (Doll, 1993, p. 157). Within our research group practices were not replaced in an unproblematic adoption of the new, but the assumptions underlying and motivating our practices were questioned, rejected, transformed, and preserved within the engagement of a process “based on the inter- or transactions peculiar to local situations” (Doll, 1993, p. 140). Herein, the present and the past provide a basis for the curricular future without dictating or controlling that future, but continuity is ongoing since one needs “the roots of history in order to grow and develop” (Doll, 1993, p. 157).
CHAPTER 4       ENounters of learning

The roots of this research have been articulated in the proceeding pages. They will reoccur and be seen anew through stories of change, frustration, and evolution. Before sharing these encounters of learning, I want to disclose how I came to re-present our experiences within this dissertation.

4.1 Restorying

If the author wants the reader to question certainty, there needs to be some textual practice that undermines certainty.

(Sumara, 2002, p. 312)

The suggestion that all written representations are fictionalizing acts reminds us that they are, necessarily, reflective of choices – conscious and nonconscious – made by the writer. They are as much statements about the perceiver (including the personal and social conditions of perception) as they are about the phenomenon perceived.

(Davis, Sumara, & Luce-Kapler, 2000, p. 225)

This text is not the only story that could be told from our research. It is but one perspective based on continually unfolding conversations among the participants. I wanted to give the text a sense of our continual and communal becoming and (un)becoming within the incongruity of ongoing change in relation.

By its very nature, such collaboration engages multiple voices, multiple perspectives and porous boundaries. To then try to collapse everything into one ‘authorial’ voice highlights the control bias inherent in such a notion (Foucault, 1984). (Luce-Kapler, Sumara, & Davis, 2002, p. 370)

My voice and ideological framing are laid bare, confronted, and interrupted by these voices and the questions they present to my views and ideological framing. I have delved into irresolvable tensions and my own taken-for-granted notions that reveal the complexities of my own thinking. I am attempting to expose my views as just one version of reality, as limited and limiting as any other. Given this multifaceted re-evaluation of my understanding of research, this study could not be reported as if methodology, identities, interactions, interpretations, and analysis were unproblematic. Re-presenting processes and experiences as still evolving, holistic, haphazard, and fragmented helped me to confront the rational and linear models of reporting research that I had previously relied upon.
My restorying of the research experience raised questions about my handling of the data and my authority to make interpretations of others (Clifford, 1988). There are several caveats to these interpretations that warrant attention. The data have not been shared in entirety and have been digested through my interpretive lens. The shortened versions of observations, interviews, and group meetings sacrifice much of the ambiguity and complexity of each participant's lived experiences and reflections. However, from my perspective, the quotations share the most salient aspects of their perspectives in an effort to suggest the variety, unpredictability, and contextuality of our thinking. Each story, conversation, and experience serves as a caution against oversimplifying or generalizing the processes undergone within the study.

Not unlike a conversation or a drawing, I have involved myself in analyzing, (re)presenting, and relating to the topics, data, and processes undertaking within this research. The sharing of data is interwoven with analysis. There are few inert and isolated facts, but webbed patterns that re-present their ongoing aliveness and relations (Doll, n.d.a.).

As a way to conduct “member checks” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) I interviewed each teacher about my interpretations so that this talking through could be intertwined within my understanding. This process led me to more collaboratively shaped interpretations while also enlarging and at times altering our initial analyses. I have found that sharing specific passages from interview transcripts was a way to represent our shared insights and separate voices. While my point of view has been shaped by the teachers' responses to my interpretations, I nevertheless had a great deal of authorial power over the interpretations presented here.

I have struggled to overcome the temptation to fall back on familiar ways of knowing and reconstructing our experiences within the research group. The chapters of this dissertation interconnect with each other, yet they do not tell a chronological, linear, and unified tale. With this study, individuals came together, worked off each other's stories, and communicated their evolving understandings in a myriad of ways not easily captured or re-presented. Segregating the data by individual was futile, since after the first meeting, we were already part of one another's story. As in conversation, themes throughout the text “overlap and intertwine within an ever-evolving and unstable web of contextualized relations” (Sumara & Luce-Kapler, 1996, p. 69). The text attempts to disclose the dynamic relationships involved in learning and change over time within the rich and evocative character of collaborative action research.

To reflect the complexity of our experiences and the dialogic intent of the research project, I have interspersed excerpts from published texts, my own narratives, texts written by teachers, drawings, along
with quotes from research transcripts. The fragmenting, collaging, and recontextualizing of voices and images is intended to intervene throughout the text in an attempt to transgress an overly progressive and/or positivistic metanarrative. As the reader moves in between voices, writing, images, and quotes, they are accessing the intertextual within the interstitial as they construct meaning in the spaces, the gaps, and the traces of overlapping and connected discourses. The images and text are placed beside each other as both interdependent expressions and diversely generative interpretations of experience. Together they further complexify learning, thinking, knowing, and living experience. There is indeterminacy, a necessary incompleteness in my attempts to resist a complete and final closure between the narrative and image, the mark and the text, the fragment and the story.

Something stated or imaged can never represent the whole truth for different individuals since all (re)presentation is but an abstraction (Trueit, 2005). This restorying called into question the idea that I could ever represent anything adequately, as if I could ever fully know something. Our beings are in flux and elude capture into systematized written formats. It follows then that the multiplicity and heterogeneity of experience within this research group cannot be synthesized into circular or spiral models of action research. The interdependencies between ideas and experiences and histories allowed for a cross fertilization of intertwining relationships that at times defied definition, unambiguous classification, and linear logic or order.

I recognize that this type of research calls on my autobiography. I influence and permeate the parameters, processes, outcomes, interpretations, and possibilities of the inquiry. In this there is always ambiguity and uncertainty as both the researched and the researcher grow towards being “the changer and the changed” (Lather, 1991b, p. 56). These shifts, from the individual to the collective, from the isolated to the holistic, from the separate to the integrated, from the silent to the reflexive, from the linear to the haphazard are described as in-process and incomplete. It is from this collage of evolving perspectives that I pull from in my effort to relay my experiences of undertaking action research with others. My reflexive commentary and self-critique are shared in an effort to interrupt the presentation of evidence by illustrating how I have constituted the data and how elusive meanings have been constructed (Lather, 1991a, 1991b). The following opening story is one such commentary.

### 4.2 Starting Points

We have to start somewhere. These starts are often rehearsed, pre-planned, anticipated, and envisioned beforehand. None of us knew what this research project would be like ahead of time, but each of us came
to our initial meeting with something in mind. There is a comfort in relying on the known in the face of the unknown. It is sometimes within resistance and comfort that we find the strength to risk beginning.

4.2.1 Perturbing Lines

Another graduate student commented to me that in art making she would “just start,” throw caution aside and just get involved in creating. From there she would explore other related art works and conceptualize. But she started with the activity.

This starting point remained elusive for about a year prior to beginning this study. I would think and collect images, but I was unable to start making. The fall before I convened the research group I was writing phrases down that were swirling in my head related to drawing.

Underdeveloped
Useless skill
Intervention
The field has changed
Expert/novice
Specialist
Purposeful sampling
Shows improvement

These were words and phrases that I had heard, used, and written during my MA thesis research as well as words that had been greatly problematized since completing my masters and embarking on my PhD. The phrase “the field has changed” was a quote from an advisor during a conversation we had about development in art that perturbed me and held a certain power over me. Within my PhD I was slowly taking apart a positivistic paradigm to which I was particularly loyal and I restated this phrase to myself hundreds of times over the course of my studies.

At the same time, I had to cut some of the dead agave stalks that remained after flowering. As I was collecting these up, I started to notice them in a different way. They were straight stalks with dead flowers still clinging on, but each one had a little variation. Some had green areas at the end and others curved at the top. The range in colour was interesting. They were all in their own stages of decay. Yet they were also lines. I found myself arranging them in different ways on the patio, photographing them, and
eventually scanning them so I could better capture their variations. In placing them in the scanner bed I had to consider them compositionally. It was at this time that I connected the word list with the linear and

not so linear stalks. No matter how I placed them, I was reminded of models of artistic development, linear mappings of growth, and statistical charts. I Photoshopped the text over the scanned images and I had started.

4.2.2 Evolving Questions

“I am such a blank page I don’t even know where to start.” (Susan, meeting 2)

At our early meetings, all of the teacher participants shared feelings of inadequacy and incompetence that were conjured up by the topic of learning and teaching related to drawing. Participants labored under a professed lack of specialized knowledge and training in art. From this, they expressed a very broad goal
for the research group – to learn about teaching drawing. They identified a need for greater understanding of the visual and textual language of art and drawing. There was great consensus around the notion that for their students, skills in pictorial realism were required for drawing success and confidence, and this would increase the likelihood that more of their students would choose to continue to pursue the arts and not end up drawing discouraged. This was based on what they felt their students craved and this perception was also intertwined with what they felt they themselves had missed as students in their own education. In part, they were seeking a way out of a cycle of reproduction, whereby these drawing discouraged teachers would not reproduce for their students the same circumstances in their teaching that had fostered their own feelings of inadequacy.

While Susan shared during meeting 2 that in regards to setting goals for her own research “I am such a blank page I don’t even know where to start,” she acknowledged a desire to explore how she could teach drawing skills associated with realism through modeling and breaking down the components into steps. These “jumping off points” (Susan, meeting 2) were what she was comfortable with – realism and step-by-step teaching. In this starting point, she was not a “blank page” and she was not alone.

Over our early group meetings, Susan came to recognize the importance of teaching drawing skills.

Susan: Somehow I got it in my head through the conversations, if you are going to get them to draw you better give them the skills to do it and you better give them some concrete opportunities to let them make some leaps of faith and build in success. (2nd interview)

Susan’s goal related to her own personal experiences with drawing as a student as well as her stepdaughter’s lack of learning in K-12 art classes. Susan summed up her art early learning in the following quote: “in elementary school I had this ‘Let’s cut this out. Let’s glue this down’” (2nd interview). Relaying her step-daughter’s experiences, also during our second one-on-one interview, Susan shared: “What she said was ‘I don’t think my teachers taught me that much.’ I think she had a lot of projects, but there wasn’t a development of skills.” Furthermore, she related the teaching of drawing to the teaching of math.

Susan: …the analogy, you know we do teach math in chunks. So you know what? Probably in art it is the same thing. (2nd interview)
Deirdre too wanted to improve students' drawing skills and break down the learning of drawing. Moreover, she wanted to develop students' abilities to observe since she planned to integrate daily observational drawing into a weeklong program her class had been chosen to participate in at the local aquarium. She was coming to understand that students needed a lot of practice focusing and drawing from observation. Deirdre also wanted to consider how she assessed drawing. Finally, this self-identified "pencil crayon queen" wanted to challenge herself to "expand on the materials I can use...because I have never thought about colour."

Early on, Richard articulated what he wanted to learn through the action research project in an email.

To: Nadine
Subject: Drawing questions, input to teaching drawing
From: Richard
Hi Nadine,
Some questions on drawing:
What is the best way to teach drawing to primary students? Is there a best starting point? Are there five or six or more absolute essential drawing skills or techniques that primary students should master to enable them to reach their drawing potential? What are the best materials to use when drawing?
Richard

He was on a quest for the "best," "absolute essential" method for teaching drawing.

4.2.3 Playing with the Basics

...the line is never quite obedient. One has to nudge, cajole.

(Berger, 2005, p. 92)

Deirdre: I would say if you ask the general public a good artist is someone who had control. (meeting 5)

While the teachers felt the "basics" of drawing needed to be explored, there also was a need for me to push them to play with these "basics" and encourage them to rearrange them in imaginative ways. So there was always a "tension between set practices and infinite possibilities, between our need to find closure and our desire to explore" (Doll, 1993, p. 118). Davis, Sumara, and Luce-Kapler (2000) refer to this balance between structure and openness as "liberating constraints." These are starting places for possible routes actualized and developed in conjunction with teaching-in-the-moment, not developed beforehand as paths to be followed.
The notion of liberating constraints emerges from an appreciation that learning is not a simple matter of “taking things in” or of accumulating information. Rather, learning is a complex process of incorporating or embodying a diversity of experiences. (Davis, Sumara, & Luce-Kapler, 2000, p. 87)

In setting tasks for the group, in particular drawing tasks, I was not overly prescriptive, but I would set limitations based on their interests. Teachers were asked to draw from observation, memory, and in a variety of other ways. For example in drawing a ping-pong ball I asked them to try and capture the tones without lines. This limitation yielded a variety of imaginative outcomes that through sharing during a meeting following our independent drawing, not only visually illustrated their understanding of the task, but also offered up unpredictable and diverse strategies within the set constraints. These tasks were the basis for further collective investigations and elaborations. Our varied interpretations and imaging contributed to a more robust appreciation of drawing and teaching within constraints.

Through sharing our processes, our ideas interacted with one another and furthered our awareness that there are many paths to knowledge, many definitions of drawing, and a myriad of processes possible even within certain constraints. A simple drawing task opened us up to the generative range of possibilities within teaching and the complexity of creating.
4.2.4 Petrified Veracity

It makes sense that my starting point in returning to drawing was not a drawing. In my first images I was playing with lines, lines of text and the linearity of the stalks, but I was not creating the lines. The juxtaposition of found items and remembered phrases was similar to how Barbara Kruger layers found photographs with text. Just as her images are culled from the very magazines that sell the ideas she is disputing (Barbara Kruger Biography, 2005), my stalks, selected from nature, clashed with notions of a natural and universal unfolding of development. The stalks were dying, but still green at the bottom. Each had its own individuality and bend. And just like my development in drawing, they were thickest at the base and withering at the top.

I was petrified of lines in drawing. I had always been a painterly drawer. I drew like I painted with areas of colour in relationship, building up form, and creating the illusion of depth. I could control colour. It would yield to my desires for verisimilitude, but I was not a master of line. I had always struggled to get the perfect, single outline of a form. I had to erase and retrace the line over and over. It limited me in ways that more painterly styles of drawing did not. Undoubtedly, in my anxiety over the quest for the perfect line I was trapped in a prison of my own making, but it was from within this prison that I came to be made aware of how I assumed one could capture and control, not only an observable world, but also the voices and experiences of others within a singularity of veracity.

4.2.5 Lifelines

Previous studies have highlighted the use of drawings in particular as an avenue to self-study (Cole & Knowles, 2000; Mitchell & Weber, 1999; Weber & Mitchell, 1996) and as a way to study teachers’ conceptions (e.g., Conway & Orland-Barak, 2004; Haney, 2004; Inbar, 1996). Generating images of teaching, learning, identity, and experience may serve as a link between tacit knowledge, which is not readily accessible, and the explicit (Inbar, 1996; Weber & Mitchell, 1996). Using drawings as a prompt for teachers’ memories and subjective theories helps them to review and reorganize previously unconnected experiences “by bringing to light nuances and ambivalences in teaching identities that might
otherwise remain hidden” (Weber & Mitchell, 1996, p. 303). This is significant in that it can illuminate how what we bring from the past can texture current identity, practices, and priorities in teaching. Drawings extend memory into a more visual form from which we can ask questions and tell new stories. Writing paints pictures with words while drawings speak with lines and colours. (Weber & Mitchell, 1996, pp. 303-304). Through researching personal drawing histories to investigate how their experiences have influenced their current beliefs and identity, participants broaden their perceptions and knowledge of the possibilities of learning through drawing.

For our second meeting I asked the group to create ‘Me Maps’ or timelines of their experiences with teaching and learning related to drawing. I asked them to attempt to think visually using lines, collage, and text about how and when drawing had come into their lives as students and teachers. This allowed for an articulation and reflection on how we arrived at our current perspectives. These maps provided a basis of understanding about each other and ourselves. We were able to find connections between the past and present along with links between our histories. In what follows I share the images and narratives associated with our individual drawing histories.

4.2.5.1 Susan

Susan: Mom had me doing some craft activities at home. She was a stay home mom — I don’t remember what activities specifically. The first structured activity I recall is finger painting.

Nadine: How is painting drawing?

Susan: You have to have something in your head first, then you are drawing through any medium. This is art. Vision, visual representation. Finger painting is drawing. For me representing is drawing. Drawing for me could mean sketching.

Nadine: Okay, so her Me Map is her representing through any medium.

Susan: I remember arts and crafts in Brownies and Guides and church camp. And I remember getting badges for this stuff. And somehow, you had to take felt and stitch something. And you had to have a drawing in your head somehow. You had to have a vision in your head to get to this end product. Even though you were doing it in different media. So somehow it had to be mapped out in your head — which is drawing. So for me drawing is not just about pencil and paper it is about imagining what it is you are going to do. You don’t necessarily have to use a
pencil and a pen to do it. I think this is bias. I am all keen for doing crafts. You give me that pattern or way to go about doing this. Conceptually this is in my comfort zone. I am all about following the rules. So I am looking for the steps. This is my rendition of Robin Hood in grade 5 when I was asked to make a picture of some commercial thing. Robin Hood on the flour bag. It’s pretty bad. Someone said to me “That is not that bad.” I had to go on the internet to look up Robin Hood. If it is in front of me...

This is grade 9. Mr. Smith is teaching us pottery on a wheel. This did not work for me. We also made these reverse image things. Lino cuts. You had to draw the opposite—“Can’t you just get me to draw what I see?” “You are really expanding my brain here.”

In grade 9-10, Mr. Smith took us to the McMichael Art Gallery and I met the Group of Seven and that was very empowering for me. I’d been on a number of fieldtrips, but this was so memorable for me. Somehow I grew to know these artists. I don’t remember if we drew anything. I started going off on this gallery thing. Grade 9-10 art was over, but it is not that it hasn’t been a big part of my life. Went to the National Gallery of Ottawa. Moved to Vancouver. Did the gallery scene. At the Vancouver Art Gallery I saw Alex Colville. Didn’t care for Emily Carr. If this were to continue on I’d show the art galleries I’d visited on my travels.

I didn’t get to my drawing of me teaching drawing because that is kind of painful. But I can vocalize. This is not in my comfort zone, so I rely on my husband or other teachers for help. And this is not something I feel is a
strong suit. I never had an arts methods course. My methods course is “Husband, what are you doing?”...I am still at the art appreciation stage in relating to my life. (meeting 2)

4.2.5.2 Richard

This is my Me Map about drawing, sketching, and painting. Pre-kindergarten I have no memory of drawing anything. Instead, I recall listening to verbal stories and radio plays. No books. My parents were into verbal stories. In grade 1, I have vague memories of drawing. We put shirts on, but no memory of painting. Skipped to grade 7 because nothing happened in between. We went to high school. We platooned. We went to the art room. We painted a lot. It was alright, I guess. Then we went to drafting which was drawing. It was a very specific kind of drawing. A horrible class. You were not allowed to drop your pencil or allowed to make smudges on your paper. In grade 7/8 that is where we started to make three-d maps. Also the first time I noticed airline posters for countries. The first time I understood that people flew away and went to galleries. I realized, “I too want to do that.” We had to choose courses. I didn’t take biology because I heard through the grapevine we had to draw a microscope. I was horrified of having to do that. I switched to physics. I couldn’t imagine drawing that [microscope]. That is how phobic I was about drawing. Drawing wasn’t too cool and art in general wasn’t.

At BCIT [British Columbia Institute of Technology], I took an architecture course. We went to Gastown in groups and had to choose a heritage building and turn it into a hotel complex. So that is when I first started to have fun with drawing and structures and nobody cared about smudges. I then went to SFU [Simon Fraser University] and
I didn’t take any art courses at this point. I remember in my early childhood course, because of the ESL [English as a second language] concern we were encouraged to mime and draw everything we did to convey English concepts. My art methods course was a dog’s breakfast, an awful course. I learned nothing. In my first grade class, I was teaching almost all ESL. All we did was mime and sketch using anything to get the ideas across. And this is when I started to teach art – murals and painting. I didn’t care if it bombed I would try something different. SFU was into realia. If you are going to draw flowers – bring them in and put them all around the room. SFU got me using large pieces of paper – paint and draw on these big pieces of paper – everything was huge. Desks by the wall.

Then I traveled to Europe. I have no memory of visiting the VAG [Vancouver Art Gallery] at this point and I don’t know why. I had gone to MOA [Museum of Anthropology] and the SFU Gallery. In Madrid, Picasso blew me away and I haven’t been the same since. This experience changed the way I taught art, because I thought that if Picasso could practice before he does it…. Then we had drafting. Used lots of paper to do preparatory sketches then paint at the paint table. Lots of preparation and crazy group work… Even though my art methods course was garbage, the galleries in Europe helped feed my hunger. I was hungry for something I didn’t get in my methods course. Went to lots of in-house workshops for new teachers including the VAG and fieldtrips with my class. I came back from Europe where you see people and classes drawing and painting on the floor, but when I called up the VAG, they were uptight only allowing pencils and pads of paper. Later a classroom opened up in the VAG but students could not paint on the floor. We are not quite where the European art galleries are…. For me going to galleries in Europe was a shock.

For some reason I didn’t mind stumbling and falling and trying what I saw Picasso do - whole parts, small parts, little pieces of things like Picasso. I have been winging it…. I guess I bring things back from my trips…. I was introduced to Reggio Emilia at a brunch. One person talked about a conference she went to in Reggio and I haven’t quite been the same since. This all led to this new venture.

Image 13: Detail from Richard’s “Me Map”

I am still trying things out in my classroom. I don’t know where I am in my classroom yet. I am integrating art through everything I can think of. I am having fun with Reggio. It is making me rethink everything I’ve done in my
career. In this project, I want to think about things to ask all of us so I can learn some more and get a lot of new ideas and go on from there. (meeting 2)

4.2.5.3 Deirdre

I did mine in a spiral. I sort of had this idea of developing and a spiral. When I think about things, there is really more of a dichotomy. As a child it was about colouring within the lines, learning to control. And my experiences as an adult have been the opposite. I have been learning to let go of control or having control taken away from me. One of my earliest memories was drawing with my mother. There was a radio program at 12 or 1 in the afternoon. It was specifically for kids to draw to. I was three or four. This [image in her Me Map] is a radio. And drawing to classical music with my mother. Memories just before my sister was born — I had my mother all to myself. We got the crayons out and there was the smell of the crayon box. In grade 1 I remember it is the story of my life. I have never been tidy. I’ve never drawn neatly and I’ve never written neatly. I think often as a kid I was undervalued. Standardized test results would come in and there was shock. Physically my work never looked like a girl would produce. It was not neat work a girl would produce. Neat, little, tidy stuff. Boys do the messy stuff. I have a memory at age seven when my pencil broke at the edge. There was no point. I loved the way it looked on the paper and the teacher got mad at me because I was messy. Here are colouring books – learning to be neat and tidy and within the lines.

At age 14 I had a wonderful teacher in grade 8. He asked us to focus on lines in the environment — I do this with my kids — and it really helped me focus. Here is my 30-second attempt at drawing my hands. In my late teens I went through a time where I had my own sketchbook and I did a lot of drawing still life on my own. So this is all learning to control. This is another aspect of my life where I do not have control. My husband — if he was going to do anything artistic he would draw. As a kid he would draw on a table. He draws on everything. Now he even draws on my sewing machine. Out of control. My children. I remember getting them not to draw on the walls. I never gave them blank paper — I never wanted to control them, but allow them to express themselves. My son, he would go to Emily Carr. Art is his love. At eight or nine, they were drawing on the walls in their room. Out of my control. Starting to have to be an art teacher — I am not in control; the control is somewhere else. I am not the expert. Here is the Kleenex box, which represents the shading with scissors and pencil crayons that I learned from my students. I learn more from my students than they learn from me. Out of my control. This is BC Place Stadium and my son’s tag graffiti — I am not in control of where or what he draws. This is my trying to do my drawing homework, another example of something out of my control. . . . (meeting 2)
4.2.5.4 Nadine

Nadine: I will quickly show you mine. Nothing visual – you will be disappointed. I was really interested in development. This is words and lines. My earliest memory is from grade 4. I have this first picture book draft where you can see that my fingerprint was the basis for my illustrations. So that is one of my drawing systems and if you were to ask me, this is how I would draw right now. I would draw in a cartoon style and I drew in this style through to university. You guys have more experience than I do with drawing in K-12 as children. I have no memory of drawing in K-12, except this picture book, even though my art classes were all taught by art specialists. In my high school ceramics class we had to sketch vases and ceramic forms and my teacher referred to my drawings as the benchmark of what he expected the other students to do in their sketchbooks, but he taught us nothing about drawing. He just required it. I do not remember ever drawing other things except for social studies and science projects.
After grade 12, I moved to Paris and I became enamored with high art. I loved looking. I went into an art history degree. Looking became an escape. Drawing for me came later than with Deirdre. I didn’t really draw until 4th year university. I recall that first drawing class having to draw a tree with a pencil and this was really tough. But we were asked to draw anything we wanted for homework that first day. I chose a piece of coral. And after 5-6 hours of effort, I knew I could draw. I knew this basically because I felt I captured this drapery. This is my first university studio class, my first homework assignment. I decided to use three types of conté — three colours and I never really drew without colour again. After this course I decided that with this amount of concentration I could draw anything. I don’t have the skills to whip something up. I need to escape and concentrate. I received no training for this. I was self-taught and I had the time. Because of this I have had a core belief that if we were put in a cell and forced to draw, eventually we would all be able to draw. But if you just gave me 5 minutes to draw something, my limitations would be revealed. Give me 5 hours and I can do a really realistic rendering of whatever is in front of me. If you asked me to draw a sunflower from memory, Richard probably could draw a sunflower better than me because of all of his experience teaching with sunflowers. Those are my humble beginnings. I continued drawing from observation — continued to do that after university.

In my Me Map I wanted to show connections. I didn’t want to have a starting and end point. Things still can feed in. I wanted to show multiple layers and I could still add a column. So I talk about — in my teaching particular projects and the students’ out of school context. The teachers that I teach and colleagues. The most generative time for my drawing development has come within my doctoral studies. My masters was pretty tight. Limited and fixed. And since then I have been opened up to new cultural definitions. Possibilities I have come across all add to my expanded notions of drawing beyond ability to render drapery. The last stage of my life has been the most generative. The end point was not being able to teach how to draw realistically. The answers were not easy. And this was a big disappointment for me, the art specialist thinking I knew everything. Questions began to linger in
what students would say and do in those gifts of things not working out, things messing up. That brought me to do my masters. Still life was a real point of conflict. I was not having my expectations met. Why was the student not able to do what I expected/what was I expecting?

Richard: So you were learning from watching the kids’ reactions and listening to what they were saying?

Nadine: I was learning from my own points of “uncomfortableness”. And I am still trying to learn. When there is “uncomfort” I stick with that and try to unravel why. So in computer or math you might feel that way. For me I have these degrees in art, I should know how to deal with this. Why is it a surprise? What about me is not making it fit? That is a constant area of “uncomfort”. (meeting 2)

4.3 Drawing Out What Comes Before

Once we began meeting and discussing as a group we began reconnecting with past ways of knowing and doing. This reconnecting-in-relation brought forth gaps, facilitated shifts, and provided a basis for our ongoing change. While traditions and familiar ways of knowing were maintained, they were also under scrutiny by ourselves and each other, and they were under revision. This chapter shares how the past
renews a trace on our present while simultaneously bringing to light the paths of our possible transformation.

4.3.1 “I could draw”

My Me Map revealed myself to be an uneasy paradox in relation to drawing. I relied on text, lines, and layers. It was tight and I was stretched to my visual limits within this map. This was as far as I was willing to go toward self-exposure. I cloaked it as pushing the limits of drawing through exploring text visually, but I knew better. I was pushing my very narrow limits. My map illustrated that I had developed theoretically over the past few years in graduate school, but my artistic practice had stalled, regressed, or maybe shrunk (Elkins & Berger, 2005). I recognized how ridiculous it was for me to ask the others to think visually and take a risk, while I was unable to go beyond text. It was after all I, the expert, who had devised this research study and asked them to participate in the first place.

In an effort to redeem myself, to let them know that “I could draw,” I brought in what I referred to as my “first drawing” (Image 15). This further added to the contradiction. I could draw. Some might say I had mastered some of the conventions of realism even in that first drawing, but regardless, I was stuck, just like they were stuck, but it was different.

My observational drawings were void of meaning and therefore of little value to me. The mastery of verisimilitude through surface effects was an endpoint I was no longer interested in. I recall asking the group, “I can draw in the ways you want to draw, but what then?” What comes after realism? There were no easy answers. But although we had different questions and baggage related to drawing, we were together in our discomfort. It occurs to me now that they wanted the very baggage I wanted to get rid of – my training in pictorial realism and western art history. They were debilitated by their perceived lack and my own excess rendered me useless. Through working in the group, I anticipated that we would all find ways to soothe, integrate, extend, deconstruct, contextualize, and make use of our respective discomforts and baggage.

But at this point, I was not sure if I was capable of a/r/tographic inquiry. There were questions related to how I would be presenting myself in the field of art education. There are risks in revealing my deficits as an artist and my own anxiety with drawing. I kept at it though out of a need to draw and write my way into and out of my headspace.
4.3.2 A Vertical View

In development it becomes possible to both reject teleology and to gain the ability to assert that a child's developmental path is both broadly predictable and specifically unknowable.

(St. Julien, 2005, p. 111)

To say that a theory of development is “culture free” is to make not a wrong claim, but an absurd one.

(Bruner, 1986, p. 135)

Davis, Sumara, and Luce-Kapler, (2000) maintain that the assumption that drawing development is a matter of innate unfolding underpins one of the most prominent features of educational discourse in the 20th Century: a collection of linear and / or hierarchical sequences and taxonomies that are generally presented in terms of staircases, pyramids, and other vertical progressions…. such images reflect a belief in direct movements toward universal, inevitable, identifiable, and desirable endpoints (p. 128)

Both Susan and Richard realized through our discussions about development and my sharing of the Piagetian developmental stages in drawing that drawing skills could be facilitated by teaching. They thought that drawing ability was inborn and immune to outside influence.

Richard: I keep thinking about artistic development and the book Drawing on the Right Side of the Brain [Edwards, 1999] because I think they go together. I think I it is true people have development stages but a good teacher can add to that by teaching in certain ways which I didn’t know. I thought Picasso was born one day, picked up a pencil and…. I also realized when I went to Madrid that he practiced and did studies. So, he worked really hard. Why can't they? That is what I want to work on I want them to get further along in the stages.

(Richard, 1st interview)

Until relatively recently the study of children's drawings has reflected a 'top down' approach which takes the pursuit of realistic representation as its goal and a stage theory which has been generalised from the work of Luquet (1927), Piaget (Inhelder & Piaget, 1958), and Kellogg (1970) as its model of development (Matthews, 1999). This developmental framework, cast the child in an outdated deficit role whereby each child was to pass through a series of age-related, hierarchical, and sequential stages as marked by specific drawing behaviours on the path to more complex ways of representing. Children begin with scribbling, then progress through the pre-schematic and schematic stages, toward imagery that incorporates the conventions of pictorial realism (Lowenfeld & Brittain, 1987).
A stage cannot be missed, nor is the sequence reversible. Each stage has its own characteristic forms of behavior and expression. As a paradigm, development presents us with a reductionist view of experience in which life can be broken down into its component parts. (McLeod, 1991, p. 97)

More recently, multiple end points (Duncum, 1999a) along with the consideration of socio-cultural influences (Kindler & Darras, 1997; Wilson & Wilson, 1977, 1985) have been incorporated into developmental paradigms. Yet, there remains a progression from simple to complex representations (Pearson, 2001). McLeod (1991) points out the futility in the evaluation of art forms as a criterion for development in his question:

Can one really say that Miro's paintings are more or less developed or more or less complex than Rembrandt's? The question, of course, is silly. Development seen in terms of simple to complex forms is inappropriate; and yet, this is often the way in which development is conceived and in which curriculum experiences are consequently structured. (p. 98)

Richard contrasted our drawing histories with his knowledge of the pre-schools of Reggio Emilia.

Richard: What I've noticed from Reggio is that kids know how to use glass bottles and paint properly. They know how to do it really young. We are not all going to be famous artists, but if we teach children really young, a hell of a lot can come out that we are not seeing in our classrooms. I'm always talking about what kids can do and the famous line is “Oh, but I have a class of grade ones and they can't do that.” I've yet to tell them that in Italy, grade one is when the project ends.

Susan: These kids have been exposed early as part of their culture. It grows to be an extension of them. This (referring to her me map) is a drawing of me doing finger painting. I don't know if I progressed past this. These kids – it is part of their breathing...they are thinking visually....

Nadine: You recognize that students are capable of a myriad of things. We have narrowly pinned down where children are supposed to be. This is different in different cultures and communities.

Susan: There is a lack of choice in this culture. (meeting 2)
Development is dependent on exposure and reflective of cultural priorities (Pearson, 2001; Walsh, 1999; Wilson & Wilson, 1977, 1985). While the paradigm of linear stage theories that claim universality and internality have permitted us to make sense of experience, this worldview is a cultural construct that is being replaced with more unruly, fluid, and recursive alternatives (Davis, Sumara, & Luce-Kapler, 2000; McLeod, 1991). An informed developmental framework takes into account a diversity of experiences and, hence, ranges of representational forms that cannot be reduced to prespecified (adult) endpoints. We do not all have collective experiences, histories, or proclivities, nor do we even interpret shared experiences in identical ways. McLeod (1991) views development as the interplay between the common structures of the mind, the individual, and the cultural context we are immersed within. It is more complex and inclusive than a nature/nurture dichotomy. Moreover, McLeod (1991) contends that development in the arts “tends to occur through exposure instead of being age related” (p. 99). Perhaps realism is valued by society, including its generalist elementary teachers and students alike because it is the style they have been exposed to the most.

For our third meeting, I asked the teacher-researchers to consider their ideal development in drawing for their students – what would the end goal be in teaching drawing?

Susan: I know nothing about ideal development. I am just going on what I have observed and what I am hearing about others. I am just making parallels. If there is someone there to expose you have a greater propensity to rise up to that. But if you don’t, maybe you are going to rise up anyway.

Richard: But it is harder on your own.

Deirdre: I didn’t finish – nature nurture thing. When I was a kid, it was “Colour in a colouring book.” In between my brother and me coming along there were nine years. My mom took her teacher training – she has a bachelor in fine arts – and she really valued fine arts even though she was not in great shape as an artist – “You didn’t give colouring books.” It was the time of free expression. You give them paper and materials and let them go to it. In my husband’s family, they drew everywhere, even the kitchen table. He was encouraged in a much different way than I was. Drawing was encouraged – that you express yourself through drawing. I was the colouring book kid and he was allowed more expression through drawing. And when I look at my kids we always gave them stuff to draw on. My son is very much an artist; he values this. And he hasn’t had any instruction except copying other kids or seeing things. His goal in life is to go to Emily Carr. But my daughter doesn’t feel like she can draw; she is not good at it and she doesn’t feel she can draw. And they had the same support. So, as a teacher I struggle with two things. Kids need free expression and you don’t want to impose. What is art? What is the purpose? The
purpose is to not necessarily draw a good still life. The purpose is to express yourself and see things in a new way. Comes down to two questions—nature nurture and what is the purpose of art?

Nadine: Have you shared your ideas about development? You connected it to your own story.

Deirdre: I only have questions. I don’t have an ideal development because I don’t know. Where does talent come into the equation? What my son does when he wants to amuse himself is draw. My daughter reads.

Richard: For me an ideal development would provide a child with the means to enjoy art. There has to be a supportive enthusiastic adult that might do art with you, take you to an art gallery. That is what I would have liked. Next thing, an art class Saturday, after school that you go and do something with an art person. A similar thing happened with reading and the Saturday library visits. I also think a household that values art and drawing. My household valued lifting weights. But drawing and reading were not valued. I didn’t know that I was missing art, but I found reading. You support kids and you give them opportunities and space.

Nadine: Part of what I think the two of you are saying—a variety of experiences is good so that you see when a child or student is interested in something and then you support a child in that area.

Richard: I think it is also important for the adult to not only share a thing that a child has a passion for. But to share what they have a passion for as well. Have it be reciprocal—have each other share. Exposure is important. I appreciate good design and good book illustration. This could have come from exposure to 1000s of books.

Nadine: Develop a sensitivity.

Richard: It is part of observation.

Susan: It is all about exploration that Deirdre is talking about too. When you talk about structure...when I was a kid all houses looked the same—structure and colour. Becoming exposed to different structure and lines you develop a sensitivity. I can’t draw a building, but I love architecture. I can’t do it, but I can escape into it. I can get nothing out of a day except looking at houses. (meeting 3)
Susan: Ideally I'd rather see some average person doing something that is stimulating in drawing than playing ping-pong. Like exercise that is stimulating a part of the brain so that part does not just go dormant. For me in drawing I am dormant.

Nadine: The ideal is that drawing does not remain dormant.

Susan: I think of it in terms of recreation. I do recreational reading, athletics, singing. Drawing can be a part of your repertoire of what you spend your time doing. Ideal for me would be that they actually find time, not in a day, not in a week, but in a month, they would find an opportunity to actually draw something.

Deirdre: That they would have the skill to do this.

Nadine: That they would get joy from it.

Susan: Yep, joy from it. (meeting 3)

Richard: I sketch, as I need to. I was sketching plans for the deck positions of plants, how high the tree should go. In school I sketch out what might be in a mural to organize a framework for the class.... I don't sketch for joy. I read. So...maybe we should think about how we teach writing and reading. Not everyone writes a novel, but everybody reads a paper or email. We use our literacy skills in our daily lives as we need to. So maybe we should think of drawing as sketching in our daily lives as it comes up: floor plan, organizing a room. Sketching as needed.

Deirdre: We do it with math.

Susan: That is a really interesting point.... I have been known to be in the theatre and sketch out the scenery because I wanted that wall the way it was done in my house. I was motivated to do it because I wanted that. But by the same token you know if you want something or if you can explain it to someone you draw it. That is where I would prefer to go.

Nadine: So the goal in K-12 is to come out with the ability to sketch when you are motivated. This is what we are saying?
Deirdre: I think that we could add you want to have the skill and you want to not feel ashamed. You want to feel that whatever you produce is okay. You don't want to have the feeling that I have that I don't want to show anybody. This is part of the being able to sketch when you want to use it. But you feel okay about it.

Nadine: So they don’t have pain. (meeting 3)

I recognize now that I was setting a trap in asking the teacher-researchers to articulate their visions of ideal development in drawing. So many of their narratives around their drawing experiences and their sharing of drawing projects from their classrooms held up and were measured against pictorial realism that I thought I could easily trap them into admitting this through their reflections on drawing development. But they were surprisingly not falling for it. I had underestimated the complexity of their aspirations in teaching drawing and in their conceptualizing the possible paths of development.

Nadine: What I assumed you’d all say was that the endpoint would be for children to draw realistically. It is tied into what Deirdre is saying because we have pain when we draw. For me it is because I know I have to spend 8 hours to make it realistic in order to be a talented artist. Why did you guys not say realism?

Richard: I think I didn’t say that because I don’t think that is an endpoint. That doesn’t matter. For those that can will... A personal bias because I cannot draw.

Nadine: So what you give to the students is what you find joy in yourself. But it also takes you off the hook, as does my endpoint because I can't take everyone to my endpoint and take 8 hours to do one drawing with my students.

Richard: I have a variety of starting points in math, PE, etc. A group of kids is all over the map. They are not all going to be in the same place. How could I assume that they end up in the same place? (meeting 3)

Richard’s views here echo McLeod’s (1991) appeal for a more vertical or simultaneous view of development in place of linear paths and normative ends that deal with students in general, not in their particularity. “Where a linear view of development is essentially context independent, this vertical view tries to accommodate both the uniqueness of the individual and the specificity of the context” (McLeod, 1991, p. 100). Inspired by Beittel’s (1973) investigation into the artistic paths of specific students, all-embracing theories move towards the artistic endeavors of students individually. The reference point for student development is the student’s own previous work and progress, not an external, abstracted theory.
of development. This more vertical view of development allows for the cultural and the individual as students are enabled “to be participants in the creation of their own development rather than passively undergoing a genetic maturation process” (McLeod, 1991, p. 106).

4.3.3 Addressing the Boogie Man

Nadine: What I am hearing from you guys is that you can’t draw because you are not able to represent things realistically. Am I wrong?

All: No. (meeting 3)

Nadine: You all felt the need to start with realism.

Richard: I think so.

Nadine: I think we had to do that in order to attempt to get into the problems we had with hearing all that stuff when we draw.

Richard: Eventually there was movement away from there.

Nadine: I think all of us moved. (2nd interview)

Post-modern art education must be more than a chronological term. It cannot reject the oppressive notions of the past unless it understands them.

(Fehr, 1994, p. 214)

Nadine: “If you are not giving me the manual what am I supposed to do? Just sit around and talk about what we don’t know for 6 months?”, which is basically what we did at the beginning. I have this theory that we had to go...

Susan: …to that place.

Nadine: We had to go into that raw need and explore it a little bit to juggle it loose. (2nd interview)

Fleener (2002) suggests that in “exploring the possibilities of and creating curriculum futures, we must address our own boogie man; those ideas, practices, and goals that have constrained our ability to change, adapt or create a new reality for schooling” (p. 12). Not unlike Ashton’s (1999) research, the teachers in my group “had to engage with some of the very drawing conventions and styles, from which they had previously felt excluded” (p. 46) in order to move from ‘drawing discouraged’ to ‘drawing encouraged’.
had anticipated that they would need to (re)discover the paths that had constructed their current assumptions and anxieties. But I did not foresee this retracing becoming such a lengthy exploration nor did I comprehend at first how persistently they would cling to their conceptions of drawing – the very conceptions that oppressed them. I thought the teachers would relish the permission to be set free from constraining versions of drawing such as drawing realistically from observation.

How could revisiting such limited notions of drawing as skill in pictorial realism motivate and challenge them to envision change and alternatives for teaching drawing? I had to be brought around to their way of viewing things. Through the acquisition of specific drawing skills in the style of realism and a familiarization with the language associated with these drawing conventions, this engagement facilitated an ongoing consideration of why pictorial realism had been privileged in their practices and perspectives related to drawing for so long. Although their teaching priorities would still include the conventions of realism, these teachers were no longer as oppressed or discouraged by the grips of this “boogie man.”

It is no wonder that the teachers felt incompetent at teaching art since their relationships to drawing were “limited to their own schooling experiences, rather than by an engagement with its creative aspects” (Davis, Sumara, & Luce-Kapler, 2000, p. 94). These teachers might be less likely to conceive of drawing “as isolated technical competences if they have experience with and knowledge of the ways such focused topics arise in the course of engaged study” (Davis, Sumara, & Luce-Kapler, 2000, p. 94). With an increased knowledge of drawing they might be released from a cycle of reproduction and become more capable of flexible and sophisticated practices in their teaching. “Both the ability to create flexible tasks and the capacity to follow student leads clearly depend on fairly broad and flexible understandings of the concepts at hand” (italics from original, Davis, Sumara, & Luce-Kapler, 2000, p. 143). They needed to have enough personal confidence in the practice and language associated with drawing from observation in order to begin “both to solve, interpret, analyze, and perform the material presented and to play with that material in imaginative and quirky manners” (italics from original, Doll, 1993, p. 164). So it was through a re-framing of these teachers’ relationships with pictorial realism in drawing that they were able to renegotiate previous encounters that had caused stagnation in their own education and become opened up to enlarged ways of understanding the possibilities, styles, and genres of drawing.

**4.3.4 Retaining a Trace**

To draw is to look, examining the structure of appearances. A drawing of a tree shows, not a tree, but a tree-being-looked-at. Whereas the sight of a tree is registered almost instantaneously, the
examination of the sight of a tree (a tree-being-looked-at) not only takes minutes or hours instead of a fraction of a second, it also involves, derives from, and refers back to, much previous experience of looking. Within the instant of the sight of a tree is established a life-experience. This is how the act of drawing refuses the process of disappearances and proposes the simultaneity of a multitude of moments.


For meeting 5 we drew ping-pong balls under one light source to get at tone and shading in order to suggest three-dimensional form on two-dimensional surfaces. While I was drawing this ping-pong ball I was taken back to a space where drawing was a form of escapism. This was a drawing that was just going to be shared with the teachers so that we could compare our strategies for rendering. I thought I would learn little in the exercise and the act of drawing required little of me conceptually. I just drew what I saw and delighted in capturing the colours and building up the illusion of form. This was not a serious endeavor.

The process amounted to a mindless capturing of what was before me onto a surface, a process void of meaning, but familiar nonetheless. I knew how I would start and I knew ahead of time what the result would be. I was a bit surprised that I did not submit myself to “incessant discursive harassment” (Ashton, 1999, p. 46) and that I was actually enjoying the escape. I am ashamed to admit that I think I had eluded those voices, temporarily, because I thought I would have a receptive audience and that the group would be impressed with my skill. It was not until the sharing of this image with the group that I began to recognize the fallacy of my thinking.

When I saw their drawings, I became conscious of how different mine was. The teachers’ balls were limited to approximately three tones ranging from black to white, but each had focused on one or more aspect of the ping-pong ball – the shadow cast by the ball, the tones on the ball, the outline of the ball.
They realized that even with a simple drawing task, we could all have different strategies and results that if shared could have helped teach each of us something about drawing this ball.

Then I shared mine. Richard did not recognize what I had drawn as a ball. It was too colourful, at least five times larger than the actual ball, seemed to disappear off the page, there were no outlines, just areas of tone. I was a bit defensive in explaining that I, like them, had my own strategies for drawing. This was how I saw the ball and how I had chosen to represent it. It was 6 am and the sun was coming into the room reflecting off the garden greenery creating areas of colour. I was crestfallen that my drawing failed to impress in the ways I had predicted. But I was also beginning to comprehend how I had left a little of myself behind in my drawing. I was not a camera. As Berger (2005/1985/1976) states, “[a] drawing slowly questions an event’s appearance and in doing so reminds us that appearances are always a construction with a history. (Our aspiration towards objectivity can only proceed from the admission of subjectivity.)” (p. 70). By not drawing up to their standards I became cognizant of my perceptual filters, my style in observational drawing, and my priorities. In sharing my drawing, the familiar became strange and precipitated a shift in me. I was now asking different questions of myself as a drawer and mulling over just how mindless and value-free my realistic drawings were. What was my role in re-presenting reality? It was no longer only about a surface.

I had not internalized the notion that “representation is never the ‘real,’ but an abstraction” (Trueit, 2005, p. 91) in relation to this drawing. Any re-presentation is a fingerprint leaving residues of one’s involvement. I was aware of this idea in art and in relation to re-presenting research experiences and data,
but again I had not connected this to my own drawing. I believed, like the teachers, that one could capture a universal reality through the mastery of the correct conventions.

What you are drawing will never be seen again, by you or by anybody else. In the whole course of time past and time to come, this moment is unique: the last opportunity to draw what will never again be visible, which has occurred once and which will never reoccur. Because the faculty of sight is continuous, because visual categories (red, yellow, dark, thick, thin) remain constant, and because so many things appear to remain in place, one tends to forget that the visual is always the result of an unrepeatable, momentary encounter. Appearances, at any given moment, are a construction emerging from the debris of everything which has previously appeared.


My ‘mindless’ drawing was the assemblage of many moments of looking, drawing, and painting seen together, “a construction emerging from the debris of all that has previously appeared” (Berger, 2005/1985/1976, p. 69). “Debris” was what I considered all of the tricks I had learned to render, things of no value in contemporary art, but of considerable interest to the teachers in the group. These tricks had been a dead-end for me in the pursuit of drawing. Once the tricks were mastered, I realized that drawing had no meaning for me as an artist and I turned to painting.

4.3.5 Shifting Teaching Philosophies

Susan: My goals in art? Let’s just make it through art class today. (meeting 3)

For the most part all three of the teachers focused their drawing lessons around perceptual awareness with a focus on developing concentration while enhancing students’ observational drawing skills. When I asked if we were feeding into children’s privileging of visually realistic drawings by teaching projects that hold up realism as the end goal, Richard explained how he has used the works of artist Ted Harrison to show an artist’s evolution from high realism to “an artist’s style”. This mirrored how he taught drawing and painting in art.

Richard: We give them skills and techniques and then ask them to represent in their own style… I think giving kids that open-endedness is important. We do it in poetry and dance. Give them a little structure and framework and then let them do their own thing. (meeting 5)

From the foundation of drawing “skills” students and artists alike could come into their own artistic vision. So while he was in one sense reproducing classical academic training based on a grounding in the
conventions of realism, Richard was also presenting a way forward that integrated skill and expression in art making.

For Susan, projects that were too "open-ended," such as projects requiring students to express themselves, were activities that would not "build confidence."

Susan: In drawing from imagination you lose the bottom end. That is where I get lost. If you are not teaching me, I don't know where to go.

Nadine: But with observation you have the low ones....

Susan: At least they have a fighting chance, somewhere to go. (meeting 4)

She felt most comfortable with teaching realism in relation to drawing. This philosophy was retained throughout the project although it was increasingly shifting to incorporate more personal expression within realistic depictions. Susan referred to this balancing act as a "marriage."

Susan: It was really interesting to have that marriage. Like in language arts — I want all of these things and the rubric allows me to have that marriage. There has to be a marriage between skill and the personal. You have this preconceived notion and sometimes you need to step outside and take into account other things. Like grammar and character development in writing. And the same is true for art. (meeting 5)

For Susan this meant that she needed to be opened up to personal style or expression in capturing what was observed in addition to measuring student work against her perception of an observed reality.

Susan: So when I look at this, I was not looking at the emotive thing that you saw. But maybe now I would value that. It is a marriage thing. That I have seen through having a student teacher and her creation of a criterion. She never looked at grammar; she was only into the creative aspects of student writing. (meeting 5)

Susan started to provide choices for her students that could render easily and for those that wanted to make things their own. But this marriage did not always work for every student in every circumstance.

Susan: Today a kid asked "Can we draw our dream house?" and another kid then asked, "What if we don't know what our dream house is?"
4.3.5.1 Who’s Teaching Whom?

I recognized in the sharing of students’ drawing projects during group meetings during the first half of the study that there was little teaching of technique involved. I characterized this as “assigning drawing” instead of actually teaching drawing.

*Nadine: Assigning something without teaching is not what I do in other subjects so why is that okay in drawing?*

*Deirdre: I don’t think people feel they have something to teach. They just do projects. (meeting 5)*

Deirdre was suggesting that given most non-art specialist art teachers’ constrained view of their artistic abilities and knowledge, the taking up of a non-interventionist approach is the most preferred, and possibly convenient, stance to adopt (Ashton, 1999). Along these lines, Ashton (1999) argues, “[P]rofessional alignments in art pedagogy are greatly influenced by generalist teachers’ personal confidence in drawing” (p. 43).

Deirdre recognized that she learned “more from my students than they learn from me” (meeting 2) and incorporated their solutions, such as using black fine liners to outline drawings and rubbing pencil crayon shavings with Kleenex to fill in the background of a drawing. She claimed that she was “not a good model” for teaching drawing and often relied on students learning techniques from each other.

*Deirdre: I don’t teach much in art. I tend to give them a structure – “This is what I want to see.” (meeting 1)*

Likewise, Susan viewed students “teaching one another” through “‘kid-friendly’ language” as the enabling of a “drawing community.”

*Susan: I think it is really valuable for kids to be teaching one another and learning from one another and having a sense of a drawing community. (meeting 9)*

*Susan: I get students to check in with certain students who will explain in ‘kid-friendly’ language how to do something. (meeting 1)*
Richard too would use the students in his class to show as examples of what to do. He also got students to draw murals for the class, stating, “Even children 6 years of age can always do ten times better than I can” (meeting 2).

Richard sees himself as a facilitator setting up the room, getting examples of art, showing sample projects, and getting books and videos from the library to help in the teaching of art. He characterized the showing of examples as “invitations.” Art activities in Richard’s class usually start with drawn studies in order to “get ready for the big one” which is to be completed in paint or a larger drawing.

Richard: If I want to have a more creative end product we do all the drafts and then they have to make their own. This gets to more diversity. I like to practice components. We do detail and part sketching prior to a final. The end assignment is open-ended. Mini-lessons as required. (meeting 6)

He typically draws a quick sketch on the board as a model for students. Drawing projects are often based on observation of real objects or inspired by art reproductions. He also uses little frames to help students “focus on the little piece we want to do.”

Richard reflecting on his teaching of art shared:

Richard: I've always thought I am still learning. I am in flux. I'm not there yet. You just keep trying new things because I don't have a lot of courses that taught me to teach art.

Susan: I don't think I am quite at that place, “Okay, we stumbled through this.” I guess I am still at this productivity mode. (meeting 2)

From Susan’s perspective, “intermediate students want direction.” Open-ended projects would not enable growth. But this presented a quandary for her. While Susan believed in demonstration – which she could
readily undertake in tennis and volleyball – she did not feel that she could demonstrate “that well in art class” (meeting 2).

Susan’s valuing of modeling as a teaching strategy for drawing originated in her recognition that this is how she would learn and therefore how her students would learn best.

Susan: *You give me that pencil and you ask me to do a drawing of whatever is in front of me. I’m going “Will my teacher even recognize this?”*

Nadine: *A pattern has a step-by-step instruction.*

Susan: *Follow the rules. So I am looking for the steps.* (meeting 2)

As the study progressed, Susan became increasingly keen and adept at using drawing to aid in the construction of meaning across the subject areas, especially in conceptual understanding. Similarly for Deirdre, “art serves other subjects” (meeting 3) because she did not feel she knew the steps to teaching art. While Deirdre would characterize her teaching before working in the group as “just pulling things out of the cupboard to have fun with” (meeting 9), she did view her year as a “work of art” and considered carefully “how stuff fits together.” Although the notion that her art program served other subjects lessened over the course of the study, she still endeavored to incorporate themes across her overall curriculum.

Deirdre related art teaching to the teaching of reading.

Deirdre: *No one in my methods taught me to teach reading. A shotgun approach fostered reading. Different approaches were encouraged so that kids could latch on. Inevitably you end up with a variety of ranges in reading. The same kind of thing happens in my art instruction. I do a bunch of different things.* (meeting 3)

Deirdre had an eclectic approach that tried to provide a variety of activities in drawing including development in the skills or realism and creative expression, as well as experiences with different media throughout a year, most of which were integrated into other subject areas. With her leaf study over the fall, she focused on observation and the conventions of realism. The hope was students would spend enough time on this unit that they might “see improvement in what they are doing” (1st interview).
Susan shared that while her husband gives her suggestions about what to teach in art class, these suggestions were predominantly for step-by-step, short-term projects that were generally disconnected from each other.

*Susan: I don't plan to the same degree in art that I do in other subject areas.* (meeting 5)

During meeting 6 Susan firmly insisted that she would not be able to pull off a long art project, but she was starting to be opened up to the notion of planning in-depth units.

*Susan: I am not doing the three-month art project. I am just not going down that road. There are not enough lessons for me.*

*Nadine: What that means is you are doing a lot more work. You've got so many little projects. You are doing a vast array of stuff, whereas we are going deeper and longer in one area.*

*Susan: That was another thing with my student teacher. She approached things from a very short perspective. I do long things like a heritage project and Aquaschool. I do not do the longer-term projects in art.* (meeting 6)

Specifically, Susan's drawing project on the theme of human rights (see image 27 for an example) involved providing students examples of photographic images from magazines related to human rights for them to copy and transfer into a larger drawing. Susan expected high realism in the resulting products, but only provided the students a few art periods in which to complete the project. I used this as an instance where she could have spent a much longer time developing a more in-depth unit.

*Nadine: You can extend a project into short sketches and break them down. I think these human rights things could have been two months.*

*Susan: That is the sense I am getting. This is helping me to think through this thing called art.* (meeting 6)

Davis, Sumara, and Luce-Kapler (2000) claim “schooling often seems to be centrally concerned with breadth of exposure rather than depth of understanding” (p. 199). Susan's reliance on short-term projects in her art teaching amounted to “little more than [a] tour through a subject area, with little opportunity to dwell — ... to live with an idea, to ruminate, and so on” (italics from original, pp. 199-200).
My experiences with teaching art, wherein my units would involve prolonged and sustained engagement with a project seemed to enable a depth and confidence in my students that shorter-term projects lacked. As Davis, Sumara, and Luce-Kapler (2000) articulate in the following passage:

If pedagogy is to be inventive rather than merely reproductive, students must have the opportunity to develop intimate and deep relationships with particular forms and content. Within these sorts of more intimate engagements, breadth need not be seen in opposition to depth. Rather, deep understandings, developed in the study of specific forms, can often enable a person to appreciate a broadened range of experiences. (pp. 200-201)

I have to admit I was surprised by Susan’s decision over the fall term to embark on an architectural drawing unit that evolved and continued into the winter term.

4.3.6 How We Come to Learn

I was curious how the participants would characterize themselves as learners. They certainly had different ways of approaching teaching and their own ways of reflecting and integrating topics discussed in the group. Susan described herself as a concrete learner. In art this translated to a preference for step-by-step projects.

Susan: I am more concrete. I realize this is part of the problem. This side of me is to the detriment of the creative side. (meeting 1)

She often expressed reluctance when an unfamiliar idea was brought up in the group.

Susan: I am a bit reticent when I hear a new idea. “I am glad you are going to try that. I am still back in the seat. That is a great idea. I don’t know where I am going to find the time; I don’t know how I am going to implement that.” It is like going to a great workshop and the workshop is over and you are going “Oh, okay. The workshop is over I am just carrying on by the bootstraps.” (1st interview)

There were often times a resistance to change in our conversations during meetings, but a greater openness to risk-taking in her teaching. In relation to her professional development, this research project was quite a different experience.
Susan: For me to listen to a lecture – it gets me thinking but it doesn’t change my practice. Not just thinking about it but actually changing practice. Where this is different is that it is really getting you to change practice.

Nadine: Because of our student teachers we didn’t start off right away. We spent four months talking and hashing out these old dichotomies – nature nurture. I could tell you were getting antsy. You really came to life when you put it into practice.

Susan: In most cases, once I have talked about something, it is time to change the topic or do something about it. (2nd interview)

When it came to my consultation with the teachers around their planning and teaching over the fall, Deirdre preferred to devise her own way forward.

Nadine: You don’t need my help

Deirdre: I need to think it through first.

Nadine: That is how you learn. It is a guarded space.

Deirdre: I am kind of independent.

Nadine: I can do the most if it is a dialogue. But for you, you need to figure things out and then we can have a dialogue. I know that as a teacher and a professional developer you really need to make things your own and you can’t be forced into it.

Deirdre: and if it all comes in at once, I can’t focus. (1st interview)

Deirdre recognized that she learned best when she was in charge.

Nadine: In your masters you did action research. And as a learner if it was self-driven...

Deirdre: That works for me. I don’t like sitting in class.

Nadine: You don’t like to be told what to do.
Deirdre: I like suggestions, but I like to be in charge and decide what I do...I am a leader.... And I am independent. It is both a strength and a liability. (2nd interview)

But the group and interactions with me provided her with the ideas, possibilities, and information she would independently mull over in creating her own units of art.

Deirdre: In pro d [professional development] it is not always the presenter I learn from. It is the conversations with teachers after. (1st interview)

In her preference for self-direction and recognition of the value of learning with and through others, Deirdre was not alone.

Nadine: Have you learned anything about yourself or your professional development through this process?

Richard: I think to really get something out of pro d, me as the teacher has to want to do it and like the topic and have input in choosing. In this project I have a lot of energy...and I have a certain amount of passion.

Nadine: Is that excitement and choice the same with a typical pro d?

Richard: At school we vote as a staff and what I find really sad is usually the pro d-day is thwarted by people. There is a presenter and feedback, and then people say all the reasons why they can't implement the ideas. They find reasons why they can't do it. It is a real downer. The quality of the pro d topic can be good but the people in the room don't want to be there and learn. It is depressing. I think of school pro d a waste of money and time.

Nadine: If the group is not enthused and you can't get a conversation going....

Richard: I like Reggio Emilia but there is never one. The quality of topics is not really bad. It is a one-shot deal – three hours and then zip. I wish they would be long term and the person would come back and you might meet individually. I don't like the process of how pro d is designed.

Nadine: It does occur to me that you do seem to learn in a social way like your practicum experience with one mentor or in a museum where you see a group doing things or in our group. You like to be in a social group that is pro active.
Richard: I like to have conversations with others. I meet with a group about pedagogy. Prof. today at the school is just dead. (1st interview)

I too seem to learn from others in conversation, especially in a supportive environment where I feel comfortable to share my limitations and beliefs. Throughout my graduate studies, it was the conversations with friends and colleagues in which I openly revealed my thinking and was questioned or critiqued that I was moved toward different ways of thinking, toward more sophisticated and complex conceptions of art education. Additionally, time and reflection on my own further assisted my transformation. The combination is crucial.

4.3.7 Museum Effects

Susan: This is the type of art enthusiast I am. I am an observer, an appreciator. I am not a doer. I am not a hands-on person. I am a “hands-off” person, till it comes to paying for the ticket to see it, I’m walking down the street and observing it or I am consciously making an effort to buy it. I’m hands-off. (meeting 2)

Richard: I think a lot of people use drawing for clarity, to clarify their thinking. I keep going back to Picasso and the hallway. I think he was using drawing to clarify his thinking. After drawing then came the big painting. (meeting 6)

During our second meeting, while we were sharing our histories of drawing, Richard shared a major influence on his art teaching. His visit to the Prado Museum in Madrid introduced him to the notion of preparatory sketches. Before one arrives at Picasso’s Guernica painting, s/he is led down a hall that displays numerous sketches done by the artist in advance of his final painting. Richard explains the impact this display had on him and his teaching in the following narrative from the meeting:

Richard: I actually thought before I went down this hall that if you were an artist you just did it and it was done. I didn’t know you had to think about it and mull things over and sketch and prepare. I didn’t know that was what they did. And so when I walked down this hall it took me about half an hour to walk down this hall before I turned and saw this painting and I couldn’t believe someone like Picasso took that long and would draw the same little tooth of a horse’s mouth over and over to get it and then start the big painting. So that was a shock and big learning point, because I thought of this hallway as the drafting of the writing process and thought of this as the art process. I didn’t have art courses; I just thought this is like the drafting, editing, proofreading, and making it better. And that is just one thing I learned from this gallery…it blew me away and I haven’t been the same since. It changed the way I taught art. (2nd meeting)
In Richard’s teaching, this experience was integrated through sketching in advance of painting. This also influenced his understanding of how students could develop an idea, an understanding, and skills that could be incorporated in a final work. So this process impacted almost every project he undertook in art class and how he structured his art units. This experience, as well as subsequent visits to Europe and galleries, helped feed a hunger he had, that was not satisfied by his art methods course which he, over the study, repeatedly described as “garbage” and “horrible” because of the course’s reliance on lecture devoid of practical applications and hands-on art making.

For Susan, encounters with artworks in galleries had also had an impact on her. In grade 10, she went on a field trip to the McMichael Gallery, which featured Canadian artists such as the Group of Seven. Susan described this experience as “memorable” and “very empowering” in that she gained an appreciation of art that had a “major impact” on her life, reflected in part by the art-filled walls of her home.

Whenever Susan spoke about Canadian artists such as Alex Colville or Cornelius Krieghoff, she had passion and a wealth of knowledge about their styles, artistic and social contexts, as well as their biographies. From this initial fieldtrip she “grew to know these artists” and she has never really stopped learning about Canadian artists, admitting that although the initial high school fieldtrip had passed, it had nonetheless become “a big part of my life” subsequently collecting prints of artists she appreciated, amassing a library of books about these artists, repeatedly visiting numerous galleries across the country, and finding joy in this appreciation.

Yet for Susan, this had not transferred to her teaching of art. “Nadine said to me, ‘Have you ever thought of taking your class to the gallery?’ And this has never crossed my mind.” By the conclusion of the research, she admitted for the first time softening to the idea, “In my box I have this Richmond Art Gallery pamphlet and I am going to actually take my class.”

I encouraged her to reconsider her art appreciation, her enjoyment of art “from the backseat,” as having value for her teaching. Susan recognized that in her appreciation there was sensitivity to looking at art and identifying certain things such as tone and movement as well as elements of composition. I believed, based on my own experiences, that our connections with specific works of art could be transferred to our teaching by sharing our understanding and appreciation of certain works that might expose students to the power of art through looking. But the issue remained for Susan; she may know what she wants in student art from her years of gallery visits, but what she is less sure about is how to get students to do this. I summed up her priorities in art teaching as: “Your program is about making; it is not looking and
responding." But over the course of the study Susan was starting to see her art appreciation as a resource for her teaching. As Susan stated during our last interview in regards to her great appreciation of Canadian art "this spending time in our group has given me the ability to recognize what Richard’s strengths are and what Deirdre’s are and to an extent what mine are.”

Being in the presence of original artwork holds power over Richard. “It screams to me,” “it pulls me across a room,” “It does something; I could stare all day.” In particular, during a visit to a Riopelle show during the study, Richard shared that the colour and surface texture really “spoke” to him and communicated a “calmness, warmth, and tranquility.” “The wiring in my head likes the reaction to the areas of colour. My head doesn’t respond the same way to the most perfectly drawn carriage in Quebec at the turn of the century.”

While Susan admitted she did not get the sense that abstract works speak to her: “I cannot see blobs and lines converging and say ‘I really want that’,” she was still hopeful that her students could take their experiences with drawing and “say ‘Oh wow’, ‘Look at that tone’, ‘Look at that dimension’, ‘Wow they did a good job’, ‘I like that’” when they encounter the work of artists.

Richard too was hoping that through exposure to a variety of styles including abstraction, that he might foster an appreciation for art beyond realism. As Susan admitted “I don’t do impressionism [abstraction] because it doesn’t have the same impact for me and maybe if I had been more exposed to it I might be more open to it.” Canadian art was her passion because in her words, “that is what I was exposed to.”

Nadine: I was called to art though looking. (meeting 2)

I could relate to both Susan and Richard’s appreciation of art and love of looking. While living in Europe the year after graduating from high school I visited more museums and galleries than any other period in my life. I too, had been enraptured by looking and standing in front of original artworks. This was the predominant experience that led me to study art history during my undergraduate education. That was my way in too.

For all four of us, there was power in being exposed to original works of art within museums and galleries. This exposure that spurred us, although apparent in Richard’s teaching of art, was not a facet of Susan and Deirdre’s teaching at the onset of the research project.
4.4 Negotiating Passages

There was power in learning with and through each other in our action research group. We took on the voices of others as our own. We saw with each other’s eyes. We negotiated our passages of coming to understanding together.

4.4.1 Conversations with Teachers

_Nadine: Is this the longest you’ve ever drawn?_

_Susan: Part of it is the company. (Meeting 8)_

In our meetings we acted together. I might open a meeting, but our talk would go in unexpected directions. Someone would add a perspective and unforeseen connection that would take us into new territory. Sharing drawings would lead us in recounting stories and asking questions that would then lead into another discussion. There were times when our assumptions and practices were made problematic by another’s experience or values. This relational knowing through the support of challenging and sustained conversation facilitated our pondering of alternative ways to think about the teaching and learning of drawing.

_Nadine: This will not be traditional research. It is going to be about relationships. How we learn from each other and I am quite uncomfortable at times with that space. (1st interview)_

I do not think I had enough of an appreciation of the risks each participant took on agreeing to be part of this research. They were asked to admit their limitations, articulate their perspectives, share their pain and fear, be observed, questioned, pushed, and draw. All of this was done in the presence of another. Drawing and art were not comfort zones and delving into beliefs that had been unconsciously and historically developed is rarely a pleasurable process to undertake in public.

_Nadine: I don’t know if you would have ever done this with a stranger._

_Susan: I wouldn’t have. (2nd interview)_
What would keep us coming back and pushing through points of discomfort was a basic trust among the group members.

Susan: There is a special bond that was there before between us. If you want to say something, you just bloody well say it. If you are with strangers, you don’t say anything. (meeting 11)

Wherever we were at in our thinking and teaching of drawing was okay. Any fears were understandable.

Susan: In drawing my childhood experience…

Nadine: …was limited.

Susan: Yeah.

Nadine: And so was your teacher preparation. You thought you had both legs shot off upon entering the project. Not realizing you were amongst friends — none of us really know what we are doing.

Susan: And you learn as you go. And I think it is comfort level. And over time you gain in confidence. Everything is comfort level. If you are in a comfortable space within a group you are going to stretch yourself. (2nd interview)

The voicing of differing opinions and experiences, the being confronted with questions and perspectives that make us uneasy, and the not-yet-knowing how to respond were all opportunities to listen and learn about each other and ourselves. We all had questions and an uncertainty about drawing; that was one of the common denominators.

Susan had done some thinking about the group as a learning situation compared to other professional development experiences.

Nadine: You’ve talked about how the group influenced you. Anything more to say?

Susan: It has had a huge impact.

Nadine: But we were friends.
Susan: I was thinking about that again today. The size and intimacy of the group made for more in-depth learning. Am I going to put it out there for John Smith [an imaginary colleague]?

Nadine: Put out what?

Susan: Anything period about my inability to do art. I am not going into staff development or staff training and say...I am not just going to put that right out there — “I am an idiot in art.” Pro d in art with someone I don’t know in the room? Nothing is coming out.

Nadine: With regular pro d in art you would just get the package of handouts and run and not sit and dwell on your insecurities and limitations, which is what I asked you to do. (2nd interview)

Susan: You can see the spin offs. Deirdre said this and Richard said this. I was thinking about it today, this is the way to do professional development. If you are going to do it in art...I don’t have the same issues in science. When you think about it, if you feel a sort of ineptitude you are going to do something that is very canned. You are not taking any risks. It is going to be cut paste and slap in the book.... I think what happened was an evolution. I became, as I sat with my colleagues — saying, “I don’t know what I am doing; we all don’t know what we are doing” — through that and through your guidance, we accomplished a heck of a lot. I knew that if I was going to be in this group I was going to grow. (2nd interview)

Richard: Before I didn’t have someone like you saying, “Try this”, “Try this”. I was stumbling in the dark trying something new. It is different. Not only because you (Nadine) are part of it, but because of the two of you (Susan and Deirdre). There is a group aspect. That adds to the whole experience. I really enjoy the social aspect. (meeting 12)

Although none of us, including me readily saw ourselves as teachers, preferring to self-identify as learners, we all recognized each other as teachers.

Nadine: What is your role in the group if you are not teacher?

Deirdre: My role is learner.

Nadine: Who is teacher?
Deirdre: Everybody. (1st interview)

I was at a disadvantage in one way. I did not have a class from which I could gather up drawing projects to share with the group. Every meeting the participants acted as teachers in sharing their projects. In taking up this active role they were not always aware of how they were inadvertently impacting on the rest of us. This sharing was identified as key for them to re-consider their own teaching.

Nadine: I think all of you have done more teaching in this group than I have.

Deirdre: I think we have learned from each other.

Susan: I think the dynamic is such that we have an openness for learning from one another. There is no “You are doing it better than me.” We all do it differently, but this is making it together. I am getting as much from Deirdre as I am from Nadine.

Richard: That is how I feel too. (meeting 11)

Richard in particular had a deep impact on the other group members.

Susan: I think Richard has been a big influence on us. I think about things in a more prolonged way. I realize it may take more than one whack at it. (meeting 12)

Deirdre: What I have learned from Richard is that art can be a part of everything else. (1st interview)

His sharing of projects and his reasoning for undertaking activities in a particular way was readily integrated into Susan and Deirdre’s teaching of drawing. We all learned more about what teaching drawing at the grade 3 level could be like and how that could relate to the other’s teaching at the higher grades.

Richard: I find the meetings...it is like a pedagogical group that is intellectually stimulating. I am hungry for this. I am retiring soon but I am not brain dead. I like to be stimulated. This came along at the perfect time. I like learning new things. New ways of teaching curriculum. Not always doing it the same way, but polishing, changing, making it better, and making it more interesting for me. Our meetings help me do that. I get excited all day at school in anticipation. It is revitalizing. I like all three of you. It is neat just hanging out and talking. (1st interview)
Richard’s enthusiasm for learning and change was commented on by the others multiple times. All of us were to some extent open to taking risks but Richard seemed to seek out the new and really get energized by not knowing beforehand where things would end up. This permeated the group in several ways. Susan was admittedly less at ease with embracing something new.

_Nadine: Susan. Her realizations and her struggles are fascinating and they encompass all of our fears and struggles. She wants to share and work things through at the same time._ (from Deirdre’s 1st interview)

She had less experience teaching at the elementary level and teaching art. In the group she would bare her gut reactions to things.

_Susan: I think it helps when you are working with colleagues. You have an appreciation of where people are coming from. We all have different expertise and we are a little more open with each other. In this group…it was a small group; we are more free to speak up._ (meeting 12)

The new was overwhelming at times and upon initially being confronted with another perspective, Susan would stand firm in her conviction that this wasn’t for her. But in her resistances she came to know her understanding of drawing in an unfamiliar way.

_Nadine: What do you think about some of your resistances? Have you thought about that? There were moments when you were the voice of reason and resistance._

_Susan: Absolutely. I realize in the small group dynamics I voiced that. “You guys can keep going but you know what, I will be a little slower getting there” or maybe I just went different places._ (2nd interview)

And the perspectives of others and the questioning by others of her perspective played on her over the course of the study.

_Susan: I sense that I am at a different place than other people are in the group. I am more hesitant. But I feel comfortable because I know the people and I know that they are going to try and encourage me and they are going to let me have my opinion. So that professional part of it I enjoy. I like the fact that people let me stew on things, come around or not come around. I like other people’s reflections. It is interesting. I like the sense of it. When people share ideas you are open to considering, not necessarily doing it, but open to possibilities._ (Susan 1st interview)
In the context of our small group of friends, Susan felt comfortable stating her limits. I could recognize my frustration with listening to her rejection of different perspectives (my perspectives in particular). There were many times when I privately questioned if she was able to shift.

_Nadine: That is very key that we have that relationship where you can exercise the right to say – “No further and here’s why.”_

_Susan: Yeah, “It is okay for you. You go for it. You try that.” But not me._

_Nadine: And it also gives us permission to say “Cool, I respect that, but I want to understand why.” Once I understand why I can keep pushing you or I can wait or I can change my direction entirely. Every time I’d wonder if you were processing, were pushing yourself, you would do it in your own ways and times, changing a little or big thing…. you would process and change on your own: on your drive to work, or in your own thought time. (2nd interview)_

Facilitating the democratic sharing of opinions was a goal in the group, but in this there were moments and periods of disruption and perturbation for everyone. There were limits to all of our open-mindedness and a fear on my part that in my pushing or reacting to the others, I was shutting down their willingness to share, learn, and shift. It was a delicate balancing act. Again, our questioning and resisting one another during group meetings would often act as the impetuous for change outside of the group.

**To: Nadine**  
**From: Susan**  
**Sent: November 7, 2006 5:41:06 PM**  
**Subject: RE: homework feedback what was it like??? having Nadine in the classroom.**

_I liked the questions, though sometimes my heart may not have been into it at the time; this allowed for self reflection; don't get to do this as often as I would like.... I liked learning from my cohorts and seeing the differences between our philosophies and our approaches._

The timing and nature of this change was hard for me to anticipate, realize, and accept in the moment of conversing. Looking back, I wanted to see and hear change happen right before me and immediately in the way I wanted it. I think that is how I understood teaching and change. Any worthwhile change happens in the classroom within the timeframe of a lesson or it does not count. What limited parameters. What pressure on the teacher to force change and on the learner to perform in such a way that the teacher can even recognize change. I have recently come to acknowledge that I learn with others and on my own in reflection. Both processes are hard to measure, evolving, and key to change.
4.4.2 Finding “ish” Spaces

In this frame, where curriculum becomes process, learning and understanding come through dialogue and reflection. Learning and understanding are made (not transmitted) as we dialogue with others and reflect on what we and they have said – as we “negotiate passages” between ourselves and others, between ourselves and our texts. Curriculum’s role, as process, is to help us negotiate these passages....

(Doll, 1993, p. 156)

While opposites, such as realism versus abstraction and the nature/nurture binary (Michael, 1991) mirroring the creative expression or interventionist dichotomy in approaches to teaching drawing, predominated our early meetings, there was also an emerging recognition that we as teachers were by-and-large uncomfortable aligning with any one side of these opposites. Inline with post-modern (Jencks, 1987) conceptions of curriculum (i.e., Doll, 1993), we were distrustful of the totalizing discourses of metanarratives or metaframeworks that directed our actions and ideologies with certainty and universality. We were becoming more open to post-modern notions of fragmentation, indeterminacy and heterogeneity (Schwandt, 2001).

At some point after our third meeting I remember speaking to an advisor about how we were stuck in these either or spaces to which the advisor responded: “Consider either, or, and both.” It was about the same time that I bought a book called ish (Reynolds, 2004) mentioned to me by a high school art teacher as something she reads to all of her classes at the beginning of a term. It shares the story of how the lead character, Ramon, goes from “carefree expressions into joyless struggles” (book sleeve) in his drawing because of his brother’s ridicule. He becomes caught up in trying to get all of his drawings “just right.” Eventually Ramon finds his artistic voice again with the help of his sister who admires the “ish-ness” of his drawings.

Nadine: But when you talk about drawing, when we say, “That person has drawing skills,” are we talking about their ability to draw realistically?

Richard: How about communicate visually to others?

Nadine: But doesn’t that mean you are communicating something that someone can recognize?

Richard: But it would not have to be an exact replica – a quick sketch like a fashion designer.
Nadine: Have you seen this book? [ish, Reynolds, 2004] Instead of drawing a flower, it talks about drawing something that is “flower-ish”. What is the baseline in drawing – it is open to debate in the art world but in the elementary classroom is it skill in depicting the conventions of realism?

Deirdre: Like in music – carry a tune and keep the beat. It is a basic.

Nadine: Maybe in drawing it is – “Do you have the line, shading, and proportion?” But this is only if the goal is realism.

Richard: Maybe we should be saying, not realism, but “realism-ish”. Enough to make it look real. It is not everything – you don’t need all of it: line, shading, proportion, as long as it is recognizable. (meeting 3)

“Ish” provided an alternative third space within dichotomies and permitted a new level of complexity from which to transform these frames.

Deirdre: We are talking about nature or nurture…. As a teacher and parent, my thing has always been you want to encourage creative expression and if you teach exactly how to do something, you quash expression. So there is that thing between teaching a technique and allowing for creative expression. (meeting 3)

In a sense this helped us to focus on how “nature is nurtured” (Doll, 1993, p. 80). It was taken up by this group as a way to nurture nature that allowed for direct teaching of the skills of pictorial realism, along with support for students’ own styles in depicting their experience, both in an effort to facilitate students’ confidence in their drawing practices, purposes, and products. The book ish (Reynolds, 2004) mirrored what we seemed to hope art education in relation to drawing could enable.

Nadine: So the goal in K-12 is to come out with the ability to sketch when you are motivated?

Deirdre: I think that we could add you want to have the skill and you want to not feel ashamed. You want to feel that whatever you produce is okay. You don’t want to have the feeling that I have that I don’t want to show anybody. This is part of the being able to sketch when you want to use it. But you feel okay about it. (meeting 3)

All this talk of “ish” and expressionism hit a nerve with Susan that actually forewarned the issues that dwelling with “ish” would later bring to the surface.
Susan: When you talk about “Does it look realistic?” – what is it if it is not realistic? That is how base it is for me. That is not to say that I don’t appreciate other forms, it is just that there is a certain comfort level in looking at something and recognizing it: “I see that this looks like this.” You are in a whole new, different zone. (meeting 3)

“Ish” opened the door for them to consider a space between realism and abstraction. “Ish” could encapsulate students representing for their own purposes and to their standards. But “ish” did not make it any easier. New issues came to the surface within a more sophisticated understanding of what teaching drawing involved.

Nadine: I wanted to pick up where our last meeting ended. Development...and we really didn’t have a consensus nor did we have one definition of what ideal drawing development would be. We were moving towards having kids feel comfortable drawing for their own purposes and, through “ish”, feeling they were in the ballpark. And it seemed to be open-ended. It would be up to the students’ purposes. But what we might think of as “ball-ish”, for example, students might compare their work with another’s and want theirs to be more like a ball. Because “ish” really felt great but it might not work for kids. It doesn’t seem to work for us in our own drawings. You are not happy with your “ish” drawings.

Richard: I went home and flip flopped. I went to school and looked at the three piles thinking, “Why do I keep putting these kids in high and these kids in low?” It amounted to “Represent an object like it is in reality” was my benchmark. That felt kind of creepy because I was so “ish” when I left. I don’t know much about art. I keep thinking about videos. I think it was Picasso – he can do both “ish” and realistic drawing – hands holding flowers, which is “peace-ish”. In my class if all I got was chunky hands symbolically...if this was all I got from kids, I would want to know more about what you can really do, then develop your own style. This sounds repressive. I don’t know how to assess their drawing. What is my benchmark? – “I like your doughy hand?” I kept going back to how a hand looks in reality. It is a conundrum. (meeting 4)

Another difficulty arising with the “ish” concept is that we may think there is a particular way to represent something – looking for detail and careful looking – but students may focus on other things or capture what they are looking at in different ways. Part of this relates to how students feel about their products and the goal of a given project. If teachers ask students to “make it their own” then teachers have to be open to seeing things from students’ perspectives and not simply measuring a project by how closely it represents an observable reality in the teacher’s eyes. Easier said than done.
Our ping-pong ball drawings helped bring this point into focus. While sharing my rendering of a ping-pong ball (Images 17 and 18), the following conversation ensued:

Richard: I would never have known it was a ping-pong ball. It doesn't look like a ping-pong ball. It looks like a sphere with a shadow.

Deirdre: It is partly the size too.

Nadine: It is the size and the colour?

Richard: It has a lot of detail and evidence of looking closely.... When you described the light coming in from the trees.... And that would come out through an interview with a child. That would fill in these gaps....

Deirdre: Time. (meeting 5)

This is where an artist’s statement or reflective writing around a drawing is so helpful in assessment and in helping us as teachers to “fill in these gaps” between how we think students are supposed to represent and how they are interpreting what they see. Teachers would have to find ways into students’ processes, decisions, and intentions. The look of the final product would not hold all the answers.

In each participant’s teaching a balancing, interacting, and dialoguing between “the creative opportunity freedom can give and the knowledge we acquire from discipline” (Doll, 1993, p. 147) was played out. This adopting of a third way enabled the teachers to more consciously be influenced, not solely determined, by their past experiences as drawers while allowing the future to emerge from their active participation with the present (Doll, 1993). But it was the ideas of the past, such as formalism, creative expressionism, and realism that we were reframing and reconstructing “in the light of an ongoing, changing present” (Doll, 1993, p. 157). It is this synthesis of traditions and plurality of influences from the past that are eclectically chosen from and selectively combined in order to best meet the particular circumstances at hand (Jencks, 1987). Doll (1993) maintains, “[e]ducationally, we need to be trained in the art of creating and choosing, not just in ordering and following. Much of our curriculum to date has trained us to be passive receivers of preordained ‘truths,’ not active creators of knowledge” (p. 8).

Curriculum in this light is not a teacher-proof package, but a dialogical and transformative process between teacher as curriculum developer (not just implementer) and “the inter- or transactions peculiar to local situations” (Doll, 1993, p. 140). In this process we simultaneously reject, transform, and preserve
that which has come before. A post-modern curriculum then “should be free of past domination but it
does need the roots of history in order to grow and develop” (Doll, 1993, p. 157). This transformation of
the teachers beginning to take on the role of curriculum creators in relation to drawing was coincided with
their burgeoning confidence in drawing.

In this process of “paradoxical blending” (Doll, 1993, p. 156) the teachers were continually negotiating
passages between intervention and nonintervention, reality and abstraction, past and present, teacher and
pupil, instead of relaying truth or being guided by one correct pathway. This required an openness to
varied viewpoints and priorities in the teaching and learning of drawing and finding connections through
practice and reflection. In Doll’s (1993, p. 151) view, this engagement is a process activity that creates the
“fascinating imaginative realm where no one owns the truth and everyone has the right to be understood”
(Kundera, 1986/1988, pp. 158-159). I experienced the teachers and myself releasing our adherences to
specific ideologies related to drawing and becoming more consciously open to the playful space of
paradoxical blending in response to our local contexts.

To: Richard
From: Nadine
Sent: October 21, 2006 8:21:45 AM
Subject: pumpkins

Richard,

has there been an emphasis on accuracy and looking?
or pumpkin“ish” drawings exploring individual
interpretations and style (possibly abstraction like you
have been doing in your own work)?
just curious
nadine

Image 20: Pumpkin, grade 3 student, pencil

Image 21: Detail of Image 20
To: Nadine  
From: Richard  
Sent: October 21, 2006 10:06:52 AM  
Subject: RE: pumpkins ... Class response to looking at real pumpkins and picture books

Nadine,

We drew accurate sketches of mini pumpkins from direct observation trying to see like an artist. Next, we sketched the mini pumpkins and enlarged them as per the IRP. Third, we looked at the art in a Bill Martin (Martin & Archaubault, 1989) picture book as I read aloud. The class sketched a draft of the style in the picture book with crayon layering of colours added as a last step. On Monday I was going to have the kids draw a large sketch of their preferred style on a painting page in prep for painting on Tuesday. Accuracy and “ish” were included as the Martin picture book has pear shaped pumpkins. We discussed the variety of colours one can use after looking at the B. Martin picture book as the pictures were quite interestingly done.

Richard

In Richard’s art units he typically included pre-sketching that focused on accuracy and then a final sketch where they were to make their own stylistic choices or work in styles inspired by an artist. In this way he enabled both creative expression and observational accuracy. Both priorities fostered as many “ish” end products as there were students in his classroom.
Although Susan admitted she did not bring “ish” into the classroom – she didn’t mention it in teaching and she didn’t read the book to the class – she was encouraging “ish” in her own way within her projects.

Susan: One last thing. I got to throw this challenge to you. You all have imaginations. I want you to make that birdhouse change. Can you give the birdhouse more detail? Could you incorporate some boards to give it more aesthetic appeal? If you were building a birdhouse how could you make it a little bit nicer? Add the molding into the picture. This gives you a little bit of license. (recorded while teaching)

I interpreted this as taking the observed and making it your own, changing it, taking it from drawing as a camera to include drawing as personal expression.

Susan: They drew the original haunted house. Then they had to add something from their own imagination, not in this picture. Original first, then add something of their own. (in conversation during a school visit)

This sequence of drawing from close observation then the addition of “something of their own” was repeated in most of the Susan’s drawing projects. While every drawing was different in the class, they were talked about in terms of how each drawing did not measure up to the actual objects in front of them. How well did they get it down? What was out of proportion, under shaded, not in perspective, lacking detail, not seen? These renditions of observed reality were not in themselves seen as “ish” by Susan at first. Slowly, instead of focusing on the deficits in the drawings, she began to delight in and notice the variations of representing and the styles of rendering the observable. This too was moving towards an appreciation of “ish.” Moreover, her own drawing of the sunset from her balcony was recognized by
Susan as “ish.” It was stylized and inspired by the actual sunset, but it was not drawing from observation with the goal of drawing as if she was a camera.

Image 26: Haunted Houses, grade 6 student

Deirdre spoke of a marriage between skill and expression and this played out in how she struck a balance in choosing her art projects over a year. Her goal in teaching art was to provide students exposure to a variety of ways to make and conceive of art, thereby providing them with choice in what they might want to pursue further on their own. Within this space she was sensitive to how students found their own ways to capture an observed reality such as a leaf or their own creative transforming of imagined cats and would encourage students to learn techniques from one another. She prized students’ finding of voice in their drawings and noted when students were proud of their works.

“Ish” enabled a way into a generative space between the personal expression/skills in depicting pictorial realism dichotomy for these teachers. It allowed them to rest in the tension of developing skills in drawing from observation, while championing the various personal choices we make in representing. Unlike drawing as if we were cameras (although one could argue we leave a trace of our perceptions, decision-making, values, and ideologies behind in any mark we make), “ish” drawings can be harder to assess. So while “ish” made sense as a way in between realism and creative expression or abstraction, it did not make assessment easier, causing us to reflect further on our values as teachers of drawing.
4.4.3 "Eyeballing it" and Other Assessment Fantasies

To think of evaluation in post-modern terms is virtually impossible, for school evaluation is almost always associated with grades and both are based on assumptions so endemic to modernist thought that without this thought evaluation loses its meaning – at least its modernist meaning.

(Doll, 1993, p. 172)

Deirdre: "This is really beautiful"; "This is not so beautiful." "Impressive." “Plain.” “Idea not well executed.” I eyeball it. Gestalt. (meeting I)

Assessment of art and drawing repeatedly surfaced during our meetings and individual interviews. All of the teacher participants admitted to marking students by comparing student-against-student. At our initial meetings I asked them to each bring samples of drawing projects that could be grouped as high, medium, and low. As the teachers described their reasoning for the groupings much was revealed that would be returned to again and again.

Susan: ...there is a randomness. The kids don't know and I don't know how I evaluate.

Deirdre: I am with you. (meeting I)

This “eyeballing”, “ball-parking”, “randomness”, or “gestalt” activity at first was considered a matter-of-fact, automatic undertaking with the added assumption that once this process was revealed to the other participants, there would be common, perhaps unspoken, ground regarding any eyeballing processes. Once groupings of students’ works were shared and explanations for assessments were attempted, this fantasy of universal standards in drawing was steadily disturbed as we each valued different practices, perceived specific characteristics of drawings in diverse ways, or could not remember why a particular drawing had been categorized at a particular level. Susan explained her ensuing realization concerning assessment in general through the following excerpt from our third group meeting:

Susan: I have high standards in everything I do. But I don't know where I get them from.

Nadine: You know what you like.

Susan: I don't know why I like it. (meeting 3)
Susan: Who is the final decider of the criteria? There is a whole world out there that sets a criterion. (meeting 5)

We opened up something to scrutiny that was rarely articulated. Assessment as a simple, closed, straightforward practice was completed silently, as quickly as possible, and according to personal preference. Preferences that were not always conscious or understood.

Deirdre: I mark…. It is the way it hits me. (1st interview)

4.4.3.1 Commonplace Location for Interpretation

It is easy for a teacher to interpret a student's art practice through past traditions, what we might term a conservative hermeneutic, and direct practice accordingly without taking the 'situation' of the student's engagement with learning into account.

(Atkinson, 2006, p. 25)

As we share our interpretations and perceptions we have the opportunity to become increasingly aware of ontological possibilities other than our own while simultaneously making our own familiar lenses more strange. By making the familiar strange we can refresh perception through a process of deconstructing our own, taken for granted beliefs, thereby affording the possibility for more elaborate ontological constructs to filter our perceptions of drawing (Riley, 2002).

The sharing of drawings (both our own and our students') functioned as texts we interpreted and responded to much the same way shared readings and writing have worked in the action research groups of Luce-Kapler, Sumara, and Davis (see Luce-Kapler, Sumara, & Davis, 2002). Our purpose was not to consolidate our experiences “but rather to wonder what we might collectively learn by critically examining our experienced identifications to and interpretations of these texts” (Luce-Kapler, Sumara, & Davis, 2002, p. 356). Through our interpretations we not only identified with each other, but we came to experience the differences among the group. For although each of us are generalist teachers at the elementary level we were confronted with how we experienced the teaching, learning, interpretation, and assessment of drawing in diverse ways and through similar, yet distinct perspectives. In interpreting the drawings we were undertaking the processes of self-interpretation and self-discovery (Sumara & Luce-Kapler, 1996). This interpretive work also aided our deeper understandings of how our assumptions and perceptions are “always culturally and historically effected” (Sumara & Luce-Kapler, 1996, p. 71).
Susan: When we were doing the roundabouts with other people's student works... for me when you guys are saying, "Look at this" and I don't see it. When they talked about their children and stuff that was going on in their works and when we started to put them in piles, I would have put things in different piles. I started to see different things. (2nd interview)

In sharing the frames through which we perceive drawings, we came to recognize that we did not see the same things; we could not always pull from similar experiences; and we even used different language to describe what we thought we perceived in the drawings. What I might call "emotive," Susan would call "primitive." Where one would see "tone," another would see "mess." When Susan noticed motion lines in one of Deirdre’s student’s drawings, Deirdre admitted never having noticed these lines before. The drawings were read more and more as “writerly” texts (Sumara & Luce-Kapler, 1996). Elements and styles of drawing became more ambiguous and open to interpretive possibilities. There was not consensus in what to value and notice. We were interrupting the flow of our individual readings thereby opening up “new interpretive locations” (Sumara & Luce-Kapler, 1996, p. 72). It was jostling, fascinating, and revealing.

During these moments, I was made aware of the language that I used and my assumption that we would all perceive characteristics in drawings in the same way. For example, in one drawing (Image 27) a student used a soft leaded pencil to create dark areas and exaggerated facial features that struck me as highly emotive.

Susan: Expression to me is... I recognize it because people talked about it. But I didn’t really pick that up. That is something that I could be looking for and haven’t been looking for. And I won’t even know whether I will recognize it or not. If something is really well done I can see the expression.... I can talk about the emotion in the painting in my girlfriend’s wall. But for me to pick that up in someone who is very primitive in his art – I don’t
see it. I remember you saying about the kid with the tank and you were saying “The emotion.” I am not seeing the emotion.

Nadine: Could you recognize it in a photo?

Susan: Yes, I could recognize it in a photo, but not a “primitive” work.

Nadine: I am often in the group saying “I see this,” but you are not there.

Susan: Because it is not concrete.

Nadine: If you see the image and I’d say “Can’t you see the emotion?”

Susan: I’d be asking, “Why did he make eyes out of proportion?” No points connecting there for me. (1st interview)

I felt fear and gloom when I looked at the image and questioned why the piece was not in her high pile. Susan saw the piece as “primitive” and “unrealistic,” both of which justified her placing it in the medium category. Despite my efforts to explain why I thought the piece was expressive, she still claimed to not feel anything when she looked at the drawing. How could she? She did not have an art degree and she did not even understand the word “emotive” in the context of a drawing. I recall feeling at a loss here, like I was too far-gone in my own art knowledge to be able to explain emotive elements in a grade 6 student’s drawing. What made sense to me at a very basic level did not compute for her. I was jostled. What other language do I assume is “basic” and “clear”? How can I teach this concept beyond breaking it down into component parts – a strategy that did not aid Susan? When have teachers and my students not understood my interpretations of artworks? What else was I not seeing? My interpretive and perceptual conventions were not commonsense and in this instance they may not have been teachable or even understood by people outside of my cultural experience and knowledge. I was revealed to myself (and others) by being confronted by Susan’s ways of seeing and I continue to ask myself what assumptions I am making about how others perceive and make interpretations.

In my attempts to “clearly” and “unambiguously” explain the emotive characteristics of this drawing I was relying on my belief “that knowledge is some sort of substance that can be passed from one person to another” (Davis, Sumara, & Luce-Kapler, 2000, p. 91). In a complexity view of learning, one’s
knowledge is “understood as an ever-evolving weave of interpretation” (Davis, Sumara, & Luce-Kapler, 2000, p. 91). No matter how unambiguous we might perceive an explanation to be, personal interpretative structures come into play. Interpretation is a process whereby one draws connections between and among experiences, so that a new circumstance is understood through its relationship to previous knowledge. Without previous exposure to interpreting the expressive qualities in art, art that she deemed “primitive,” Susan did not have previous experiences to connect this concept to and it therefore did not make sense, in that moment.

Deirdre: I never thought of [assessment] in the way we have in this group. (1st interview)

Through the shared interpretation of drawings, we were bringing out into the open the usually invisible interpretive practices that compete and converge in assessing and understanding drawings. This might have amounted to us sharing our respective interpretive/perceptual inventories of our art histories, vocabularies, and viewing practices, but something else also was going on as well. I would continue to encounter the word “emotive” in our meetings, I would attempt to speak about drawings using language I had heard the teachers use, words such as “primitive” were re-configured, and “movement” would be taken up by those previously unaware of this in drawings.

Richard: I will probably look at [assessment] from a different lens now and that makes it more complex because I will think of more layers.... (2nd interview)

Our individual “inventories” were washing over each other and perturbing and being integrated into our communal and relational understandings of drawing. As we shared interpretations we learned about ourselves while learning to become someone else in relation to drawing. These sharing of drawings as “writerly” curriculum “announced a commonplace location for interpretation” and knowledge generation that “functioned to collect and reorganize previously unconnected past, present, and projected identities and experiences” (Sumara & Luce-Kapler, 1996, p. 81).
Susan: This student. If I had not been in this group I would have given him a B. But now I am getting the idea that there are things I don't even recognize. “What is all that fuzziness doing in there? – Oh yeah. That fuzziness, that haziness is a good thing.” I learned from him about that sculptured look. My diagram on the overhead, I didn’t have that in there at all. But he did. In my next lesson…I had some kids go over and look at his work. (meeting 9)

In this sense we were “(un)becoming” (Sumara & Luce-Kapler, 1996) teachers of drawing, making explicit, unraveling, and unlearning the taken-for-granted assumptions we brought to the teaching, learning, and evaluating of drawing thereby interrupting a hermeneutics of reproduction. Interpreting and assessing drawings became “more ambiguous and disruptive than usual” (Sumara & Luce-Kapler, 1996, p. 81). These activities were curricular spaces in which we could consider how both our students and we were located within various conceptions of drawing that functioned to shape our teaching and drawing identities. In particular, the evaluation of drawings based on observation was a powerful site of collective disruption of pedagogised identities.

4.4.3.2 Constructed Realities

Commentators remark with astonishment that the Paleolithic painters knew the rudiments of perspective! When they say this, they are thinking of Renaissance perspective. The truth is that anyone at any time who draws or has drawn, knows very well that some things are nearer and others farther away. This is a tactile as much as an optical given. What changes is how this experience of observing some things coming forward and others receding, is pictorially articulated within the dominant view of what space means. This view changes from culture to culture. Perspective is not a science but a hope. Traditional Chinese art looked at the earth from a Confucian mountain top; Japanese art looked closely around screens; Italian Renaissance art surveyed conquered nature through the window or door-frame of a palace. For the Cro-Magnons space is a metaphysical arena of continually intermittent appearances and disappearances.

(Berger, 2005, p. 94)

For the first half of the study Susan maintained that pictorial realism was something in art she was able to recognize and therefore assess. The students who could capture reality in a drawing and make it look like a photograph would get the higher marks. She would not place herself among this group.

Nadine: At what level would you assess your drawing skills if you were in your class?

Susan: C−.
Nadine: What you are saying is that your only measure is how realistic something looks? That is pretty limited.

Susan: We come with all these biases. I try and recognize them.

Nadine: It is hard to "unwrite" your story. Expression – how do we value that? I know you value realism. But in our definitions of drawing we reveal our biases.

Susan: There are different bars. You can recognize things – like in realism. But what about the kid that makes it look expressionistic? To me that person is developing. It still has to be presented in a way we can recognize.

(meeting 1)

Atkinson (2001) examines the discourses in which teachers and students develop and acquire their pedagogised identities in relation to drawing. He explores how particular students’ drawings from observation can be conceived as straightforward to interpret and assess, while others are considered difficult. In general, those drawings that are readily interpreted are ones that we are able to make meaning from within codes of representation that are not actually timeless and universal discourses, but codes reflective of particular social and historical contexts that we are immersed in. “This is not because the drawing reflects a visual correspondence with reality (although we might believe this to be the case) but because the drawing is recognized within the accepted representational code” (Atkinson, 2001, p. 104). Here one must begin to appreciate that “[r]epresentation of the world as it is experienced is shown to be impossible” (Atkinson, 2001, p. 106).

Atkinson critiques the common epistemological and ontological positions underpinning a natural attitude towards representation (Bryson, 1983) that assume a visual correspondence between the form of objects represented in a drawing and the form of objects actually in the world. This natural attitude towards representation in drawing is implicit in the assessment of students’ drawing of representational form according to each drawing’s degree of correspondence with a specific view of a real object. In this way students who are considered able drawers are those that “are able to employ a particular representational system” (Atkinson, 2001, p. 99). They are able to draw in a particular way that demonstrates representational efficacy inline with regulatory discourses or accepted (as normal) systems of representation. These frameworks, indeed the supposed reality that a drawing is measured against, all exist outside of the drawing itself.
Using Lacanian theory, Atkinson (2001) turns the understanding of representation “as the direct retrieval of information from the world via the process of perception, towards seeing representation as a signifying practice which constructs rather than retrieves reality” (p. 102). The use of the phrase “representational accuracy” in drawing invokes the fantasies of both “a directly accessible world and the illusion of the representational system’s ability to retrieve its truth” (Atkinson, 2001, p. 102). It is a fantasy to believe we can know one objective world in one stable way, that any representational form or system can “elicit optical truth” (Atkinson, 2001, p. 102), and furthermore that a student’s level of graphic skill (perspectival projection in particular) can be assessed according to its correspondence with a viewed reality “as it is”. It follows then that “[a]ssessment can only interpret the student’s experiences within a specific discourse in which these experiences are constructed, not revealed” (Atkinson, 2001, p. 103).

Susan: Society causes anxiety because if you don’t measure up to societal values, you can’t draw. I don’t know anything about the history of art. I reflected on Richard wanting to go into abstraction. I can reflect on it, I’m not sure I am there yet. I am not sure I have enough background to help teach it to kids. I think you have a greater license with the younger children.

Richard: I do. The kids will do anything.

Nadine: Our kids are more into realism.

Susan: Is that cause I led them there?

Nadine: They were already there when they got to you. And all of you wanted to start with realism. Kids and you guys seemed to want to start there. (meeting 12)

Conversely, those drawings that tend to be more difficult to interpret and assess are characterized as mysterious because they fall outside of “the discourses through which we form understanding of representational practice and which constitute assessment criteria” (Atkinson, 2001, p. 97). Atkinson calls on educators to use these interpretive crises to trigger changes in perception as illustrated in the following quotation: “[I]f we are disturbed enough to reflect upon the hermeneutic structure of our interpretational discourse there is the possibility of forming a new hermeneutic...so that meaning emerges” (Atkinson, 2001, p. 97). This disturbance and subsequent change in perspective might “effect a more inclusive approach to assessment and, consequently, a radicalization of perceptions of students as learners” (Atkinson, 2001, p. 97).
In our group we were unpacking and questioning the discourses through which we interpreted students’ drawings and as such we were illuminating “the gap between the action of drawing practice and the discourses in which we understand such practice” (Atkinson, 2001, p. 104). The student drawings that appeared mysterious or strange, which were therefore difficult to understand and often interpreted as defective or weak representations of reality did facilitate a disruption or jarring of the representational codes that enabled the ways in which we understood and assessed the practices of representation in drawing. “The effect of the oddness or the singularity of such drawings upon a student’s pedagogised identity is that the student frequently occupies a place of otherness in relation to accepted practice” (Atkinson, 2001, p. 104). It is through approaching this drawing as something lying beyond our conventional frameworks of understanding [that] we can consider and evaluate the very discourses in which we understand and assess drawings and students’ art practices. We can be forced to reflect upon the epistemological frameworks which constitute our understanding and the ontology or phenomenology of a student’s drawing practice. Such reflection may present us with possibilities for developing a more inclusive approach to the difference of students’ art practices. (Atkinson, 2001, p. 105)

Susan: I am now seeing things I didn’t see before. I am more open. For example, I see John as being an okay artist. He is what we call a “messy artist”.

Nadine: Does that make it more confusing?....

Susan: Now I am seeing some of the “ishes.” I didn’t see the “ish” before..... John got a B this year.

Nadine: And that wouldn’t have happened last year?

Susan: I don’t know. I know John is a messy artist and that doesn’t bother me anymore. He has his own style. He can get a product out and it is “ish.” He has a childlike way about his art that is great. (2nd interview)

As Atkinson (2001) predicts, this did entail an overhaul of our purposes for assessment and a corresponding revised understanding of students’ art practices. The shift towards greater accommodation of difference in drawing practices precipitated shifts in our assessment practices. How we were calling the subjectivities of our students into existence became more unstable, at times defied categorization (Atkinson, 2001). While we became more conscious of the historical, cultural, and social traces apparent
in our assessment practices, we also grappled with a need for order. In this need I have come to
acknowledge that we were searching for a different kind of order in our assessment practices.
An order whose temporality is heterogeneous, an order which is grounded in a project of
difference, an order which values different ontologies of practice, an order where the
singular is not reduced to the normative, an order which is grounded in experience.
(Atkinson, 2001, p. 106)

4.4.3.3 The Fantasy of Assessing without a Canon

The difficulty with a post-modern, transformative curriculum is that there is no ideally set norm, no
canon which can exist as a universal reference point.... yet precision and stability are two qualities
graded measurement assumes.
(Doll, 1993, p. 173)

Assessment assumes a stable, transmissive pedagogy based on a canon or closed set of particular
knowledge that students are to acquire and demonstrate understanding of in “acceptable” ways (Doll,
1993, p. 172). Assessment then measures “the ‘deficit’ between the canon presented and the canon
acquired” (Doll, 1993, p. 172). What if we problematize this assumption of the existence of a single
canon acting as a totalizing guide in drawing as we undertake a post-modern conception of curriculum,
which is always in flux, transformation, and continual transaction? As the participants in this study
conversed around their presumptions of a canon in drawing, the minute differences apparent in our
defining of an overall standard led “over time to greater and greater internal discrepancies, with the canon
eventually disintegrating” (Doll, 1993, p. 173) and with the rejection of any single stable, precise, or
overarching norm.

Richard: The kid I gave an Approaching. If I could do it again I would give them all Meeting. And that is what
I've learned from this whole session. Who am I if that is his personal style? And so I thought 'Why didn't I think
of this 5 days ago?' So that was my lingering thought. You know when you wake up at 4 am over reports. That
happened – “Oh yeah, personal style.” It is learning process. (meeting 12)

This notion of teaching and assessing as a “learning process” with “lingering thoughts” and self-
questioning represents a more conscious and reflective stance towards assessment based on a more open
canon than the “ball-parking” processes first articulated at the start of this research project. To assess
without a canon is paramount to a fantasy, but if the canons are co-created, allowing for flexibility and
validating of a multitude of ways to demonstrate understanding, an understanding that is always open to
the generation of knowledge in this particular context at this particular time for this particular student and
teacher, then we might be moving towards a version of post-modern assessment within multiple canons.

4.4.4 Defining Drawing

For meeting 6, I asked the group to bring in their working definitions of drawing. Susan’s definition
encompassed: “Using an implement or tool to create an image that represents sounds, feeling, moods,
objects, persons, an expression of one’s creativity, or a message.”

Richard: Months ago you blew me away when you said that using a paintbrush could be drawing. Not just a
pencil. I always thought that paint was painting. I think that drawing is any medium used to create a picture. I
sort of expanded my idea of drawing.

Deirdre: Do you keep in there drawing is only two-dimensional? Would you consider drawing if it was sculpture?

Richard: It doesn’t matter what dimension. When the kids were using the wire [Image 29], it is a kind of
drawing because you are using lines, except they are three dimensions…. My definition is drawing occurs
whenever you use whatever kind of medium you want to choose it is creating an image. Making an
image…. Because of the things you’ve said all year have expanded on what I think is drawing. And on
this last one [ping-pong ball drawing activity] when you said, “Don’t use lines” I thought that was an
interesting twist. Smudges, blobs, shading are not lines. A line is a continuous point. I would not have
thought of that a year ago. Sculpture was clay, I’d never heard of wire before Reggio. Painting was paint. Drawing
was with a pencil. You have thrown out a couple of interesting phrases and made me think about it and that is
where I am now. It was very compartmentalized.

Nadine: I would echo what Richard has been saying. In the past couple of years things have been expanding.
Contemporary artists will draw by walking through a field. Drawing as the physical creation of something. Making
a mark. It is a huge, all encompassing thing.
Susan: Where does gesture come in?

Nadine: We use our bodies as implements. Earlier in the last century kids would draw in dirt and paint with sticks. Then things got more narrowed. In the past 5 years Eileen Adams has undertaken The Big Draw where public spaces in England are devoted to drawing. This is pushing the boundaries of who, what, when, where, why around the possibilities of drawing. What do you think about expanded definitions?

Susan: It adds variety. Especially when you go to your art closet. It expands the horizons of what you might do.

Richard: It is not confining. (meeting 6)

Deirdre: I think drawing is a representation. I think I wouldn't limit it. It can be a representation of feelings that allows it to be “ish”, of reality.... (1st interview)

From these definitions I assumed they were working within a post-modern understanding of drawing. Talking about drawing is different than teaching drawing. Discipline and conceptual boundaries were easily expanded and traversed in their working definitions. This expansion seemed to contract once back in the classroom, at least in my experience observing, talking, and teaching with them over the fall. Students used pencils, chalk pastels, pencil crayons, watercolours, tempera paint, and oil pastels. They drew on paper of various dimensions, in sketchbooks, on watercolour paper, and on masonite boards. They looked at pumpkins, bouquets of flowers, picture books, photocopied pages of haunted houses, DVDs, leaves, internet images, art text books, architectural drawings, art books, pages from building supply books, bird houses, pine cones, reproductions of artists’ works, and through jewelers’ loupes as well as paper frames. They sat in their desks, collaborated with others, stood, and did walk abouts to view each other’s works. While drawing they painted, morphed, abstracted, observed, studied, extended, remembered, expressed, transformed, imagined, enlarged, dripped, talked, responded, created stories, coloured, listened to music, fantasized, and shared their thinking. After and or before drawing they listened, questioned, shared, discussed, wrote, planned, sketched, and observed. Drawing enabled observation, meta-cognitive awareness, narrative, collaboration, language development, meaning making, representation, elaboration, concentration, experimentation, exploration, skill development, and perceptual awareness.
Because I had not gone into their classrooms before the fall, I had a difficult time understanding some of their changes in practice and perception. Certainly I saw the projects they had worked on over the year. These were retained, collected, and readily shared with the group over our first six meetings. So when we started up in the fall, this would be the first time that they alone would be teaching their class, as opposed to advising a student teacher.

I was looking for fast and dramatic change. So much so that the integration of techniques and definitions on the part of a teacher would sometimes be ignored on my part. I had my own endpoint in mind and this was actually bolstered by the definitions they had shared during meeting 6. I basically saw what was going on in the classrooms as a reverting to drawing from observation and focusing on the conventions of realism. But this revealed more about my frames of interpretation in relation to "what was going on."

4.4.5 Drawing Back

A drawing is an autobiographical record of one's discovery of an event – seen, remembered or imagined.

(Berger, 2005/1960, p. 4)

Nadine: Nothing visual – you will be disappointed. (meeting 2)

My Me Map’s reliance on text and my need to find redemption in the sharing of my coral drawing provided an opening into which I entered through my next “drawing”. I had been unwilling to represent my history visually, while my coral drawing had become meaningless. Somehow I decided to trace the lines of the shapes within my coral drawing. In the midst of this return to my drawing origins I produced a soundtrack of the "incessant discursive harassment" (Ashton, 1999, p. 46) I regularly subjected myself to in relation to drawing. The discourses in my head were not the voices that critiqued the teacher-participants when they drew or considered their drawing skills measured against the style of high realism. Mine belittled my valorization of pictorial realism as just the capturing of the surface of an experience. I could abstract an observed reality in painting, I could explore the conceptual in sculpture and installation, I could image narrative themes in printmaking and collage, but in drawing, I was fixed on the conventions of pictorial realism and immersed in their legacies.
I found that I was unable to look or mark without language. I was familiar with how for children drawing is rarely a discrete practice but one that is inter-related with other forms of representation and expression such as language. They often talk while they draw. Hence their identities as learners are formed through a variety of inter-related signifying practices. I was no different. The conceptual had interrupted the surface of my drawing. With this I attempted to make my interior dialogue visible. I was ready to deface what had given me pride, what had been my ticket in, my own imagined entrance exam into art education and art.
making. If I could draw realistically, I belonged. This goalpost had transformed into my Achilles heel. The only way I could envision temporarily breaking the spell of the surface of this drawing was by covering it over with vellum and words. As the words re-traced the outlines of the spaces within the drawing I articulated how each line had a lineage and meaning. The horizon line, the curves of drapery, the shapes of crevices on the coral, and the edges of the background were revealed as areas of textual significance that added to while detracting from the illusion of the drawing. I went below the surface of this illusive space that I had created by layering over the meanings I now associated with this image.

4.4.6 Seeing the Imperceptible

To draw is to look, examining the structure of appearances. A drawing of a tree shows, not a tree, but a tree-being-looked-at. Whereas the sight of a tree is registered almost instantaneously, the examination of the sight of a tree (a tree-being-looked-at) not only takes minutes or hours instead of a fraction of a second, it also involves, derives from, and refers back to, much previous experience of looking. Within the instant of the sight of a tree is established a life-experience. This is how the act of drawing refuses the process of disappearances and proposes the simultaneity of a multitude of moments.


[H]uman beings have lost the sense that one moment exists within another. The present moment contains infinite moments past, both remembered and forgotten, making possible the multiple interpretations of memory and history.

(Luce-Kapler, Sumara, & Davis, 2002, p. 361)

In interpretation knowledge is not pre-existent or unchanging. Plurality and possibility abound. But we must “learn to perceive what we perceive” (Davis, Sumara, & Luce-Kapler, 2000, p. 14) and therefore perception is based on past experience and expectation.

Susan: This is where I struggle because it is perspective and where you come from and the values that you bring.

(meeting 7)

There is only a certain amount that is “allowed to impinge on the senses” while our interpretive habits (based largely in language) select “where sensory abilities are directed” (Davis, Sumara, & Luce-Kapler, 2000, p. 14) as well as what aspects of the world enter our awareness and what remains imperceptible. It follows then that “what is named can be noticed; what is not named is unlikely to be seen” (Davis, Sumara, & Luce-Kapler, 2000, p. 15). Like drawing, perception reconstructs while taking in only part of the world (Reynolds, 2005).
4.4.6.1 The Social Semiotics of Drawing

Through the selection and combination of a variety of elements, processes, materials, surfaces, and marks drawings communicate something about our experiences in the world, whether mood, surface properties, form, and/or spatial depth. Our aesthetic priorities and sensibilities as producers and viewers of drawings are "the product of correlations between semiotic codes and the social structures in which those codes have become conventionalized" (italics from original, Riley, 2002, p. 259). The drawing conventions we recognize, value, use, challenge, and invent are culturally-determined reflecting a wider social context while these conventions are also "conditioned by the kinds of language-determined realities that form us as social beings" (italics from original, Riley, 2002, p. 259). At the same time, these visual semiotic codes are conditioned by and a means through which we express our perceptual encounters and relations with the world. "The way the producer selects and combines the compositional elements of the drawing, and how the viewer relates to that drawing, are both functions of the social contexts in which the work is (re) produced" (Riley, 2002, p. 261). According to Riley, the aforementioned outline of a social semiotics (Halliday, 1978) of drawing suggests a triad linking ways of drawing, perceptual modes, and social structures. "The greater degree to which the drawer understands reality as the product of perceptual experience filtered through language, the greater the possibility of producing innovative drawings" (Riley, 2002, p. 259) and, I would add, innovative interpretations of drawings.

It would seem then an important function of teaching is to foster different habits of interpretation and perception through developing an enhanced awareness of where and how our knowledge emerges from within a complex inter-action between our cultural, biological, and experiential histories. "So understood, teaching seems to be less about helping students to know what they don’t know and more about helping them to notice what they haven’t noticed" (italics from original, Davis, Sumara, & Luce-Kapler, 2000, p. 26) while also studying the basis of our positionings and perspectives.

Susan: When they talked about their children and stuff that was going on in their works...I started to see different things. I think it is because of a lack of exposure to children's art. I am coming from an adult perspective. I think there are a lot of things because I came from high school that I haven't been appreciating from a child's perspective. (2nd interview)

In this coming to awareness of our perceptual processes we can reveal how our interpretations are far from objective or neutral and how they are formed through expectation, selection, partiality, bias, and prejudice (Davis, Sumara, & Luce-Kapler, 2000, p. 38). While it is hard to shed an interpretive frame, in teaching it is "imperative to be attentive to blind spots, to transparent assumptions, to unintended
consequences” (Davis, Sumara, & Luce-Kapler, 2000, p. 40) that form our webs of belief related to knowledge, learning, and learners. It is also important to be aware that “there is no ‘best’ frames, world views, theories, or sensibilities – merely ones that are better fitted to constantly changing circumstances” (Davis, Sumara, & Luce-Kapler, 2000, pp. 39-40). It is only through the interrogation of perception and interpretation that we can make available for critical examination the basis of our invisible and unproblematic understandings (Davis, Sumara, & Luce-Kapler, 2000, p. 52), thereby enlarging our capacity for meaning making (Fleener, 2005). Reynolds (2005) suggests that it is through conversation with others that a powerful space is created “where together we see what none of us could see alone” (p. 269).

4.4.6.2 Seeing Anew

Especially meaningful to me is Wittgenstein’s notion that to change our understandings is like putting on a new pair of glasses. (Fleener, 2005, p. 14)

Each of us perceived things differently, but through sharing our perspectives we expanded what we were able to recognize. During meeting 8 we (Deirdre was not able to join us for this evening) drew from Susan’s balcony overlooking Vancouver and this too acted as an example of how we can perceive even a landscape very differently. Over the summer I had met Susan on the same balcony and as we sat admiring her view of the sunset I brought up how the mountains in the distance appeared lighter from the cityscape closer to us. Things went from darker to lighter. Later in the year, I asked her during meeting 7 if she remembered the layers every time she looked at her view. She had thought about it, but not actually seen it. This was a view that was a part of her daily life, on the clear days at least. When we made our way up there again for our eighth meeting I tried to explain atmospheric perspective to Richard. “Closest to us is the darkest. All the way out there is almost as light as the sky.” After about 30 minutes of drawing this very sunset, Susan called out “Oh my god, layer, layer, layer. This is what artists do they have the ability to capture and see light.” Through me
pointing it out and through her sitting down to draw, thereby attending in a different way to the view she was so familiar with, she saw it anew.

This seeing anew happened repeatedly during our sharing of drawings. While looking at students’ drawings from Deirdre’s class, Susan picked up on certain features of an artwork that were not previously noticed by Deirdre.

Susan: Perspective. The bike is not on the edge of the earth. There is motion, fluidity. See the directions of the lines in the pant legs?

Deirdre: The motion, when you started talking about the motion, I never would have noticed the motion. I hadn’t noticed those things. (meeting 1)

Susan was unsure of where this understanding of perspective or motion came from, but she conceded that she probably became aware of motion from her experience looking at works by the Group of Seven.

Over the fall, Susan often shared stories of one student that drew “kind of smudgy” and how her perceptions of his work were transformed through her participation in our group discussions.

Susan: I have a boy in my class and this is what I have learned from this group. If I had looked at his work I would have said “Oh that is nice” but I would not have recognized his level of skill if I had not been in this group. Because he uses a technique that blurs the line so he loses some detail in his drawing. He starts out with the detail. If you saw what he did originally and what he ended up with at the end. There is detail at the beginning and not so much at the end. There is movement and depth. But to the untrained eye you’d go “It kind of looks kind of smudgy.” See I was getting lost in the detail part. This is what this little boy and this group has done for me…. I saw the detail at the start and how he moved away from that with the smudging and shading. He added layers. (meeting 8)

Susan: Again to my eye, last year I would have gone “What is all the scribble stuff?” and now I am going “Oh, okay.” Now I am getting it. (meeting 9)
Back on Susan’s balcony during our eighth meeting I kept saying, “I see purple,” “The purple is just spectacular,” to which the others answered back: “I see blue;” “I see orange, but I don’t get purple.” After the sun had set and I had created a predominantly purple sunset drawing, I took off my sunglasses. “That was why I was seeing all the purple. The purple lenses in my sunglasses!”

Image 33: “Seeing Purple” by Nadine, dry pastels

4.4.6 (Re)Marks of Influence

*Richard: You can’t draw without thinking about what you are doing. (2nd interview)*

At the start of this study, drawing itself was too meaningful, too hard. Every line, every mark reverberated with a disabling discourse and stirred inadequacies. There were no voiceless images. Although I claimed that my drawing had become meaningless, whenever I even thought about drawing I was plagued by voices that had a paralyzing effect on my creating. I found I had to represent my thoughts about drawing through different processes, quite apart from drawing as I had known it. Up to now I had mapped my history with words, scanned images of found objects, and layered text over an old drawing. I was relying on re-contextualizing and appropriating from the already present as the basis of my making. When I considered my next drawing I looked again to borrow from the present and the past.
After drawing the ping-pong ball I had left the ball out on the table. When I returned to it there were numerous shadows created from opposing and multiple sources of light. This attracted me because I saw the ball echoed and reflected in the multiple shadows that surrounded it. It reminded me of the echoes from the past I hear related to drawing and how traces of these discourses shadowed my creating.

The history of art education is a series of ideas and issues that are disputed, modified, revisited, ignored, and deemed obsolete. I was shaped by these waves of historical relations. I attempted to connect the critical voices I heard when I considered drawing to some of their historical and theoretical origins by finding certain passages that echoed in my self-talk. I looked to collage as a way to articulate a coming to historical consciousness. Again I would draw without drawing, or draw with words.

I cut from photocopied texts of typed out passages from a variety of sources. With the ovals of shadows as a guide, I chose font colours that corresponded with the shadows’ tones. The text was shaped according to each shadow. There was a feeling of empowerment over my history through the layering of texts that influenced my perspectives on drawing and through making visual the discursive basis of my subjectivity. Within this recontextualization of texts were contradictions, overlaps, and connected discourses reflecting the ambiguity and indeterminacy of my lived experience of drawing.
4.5 Perceptions of Drawing

Conflicting purposes, products, contexts, and creators of drawings were brought together in this research. Focusing on drawing across this variety facilitated more complex views of the processes and products of drawing, both inside and outside of elementary schools.

4.5.1 Knowledge as Drawing

The forms associated with formal education include objects (novels, chalk, pencils, etc.) and practices (sitting in desks,...). In developing relationships to such objects and practices, students are both learning form and coming to form. They are being informed and they are conforming, even as they participate in the reform of subject matters, culture, and identities.

(italics from original, Davis, Sumara, & Luce-Kapler, 2000, p. 155)

Bodily action enables the processes of learning and understanding through action. Bodily action in conjunction with objects such as a pencil reflects “knowledge as action” (Davis, Sumara, & Luce-Kapler, 2000, p. 73). It then follows that just as cognition is spread through one’s body, so it is distributed across the objects of one’s world. This is, departing from the commonsensical notion that thought and memory reside in the brain, cognition is stretched beyond neural processes and bodily action to include more worldly objects. Our thinking, for example, can be greatly enabled by books, pencils, internet access, and so on. (Davis, Sumara, & Luce-Kapler, 2000, p. 66)
The gestures of the hand are intimately connected to our thinking as we type, write, and, perhaps, draw we give visual form to our knowing. Through the process of bodily action in conjunction with objects, a body's knowledge can encompass habits and behaviors that enable more sophisticated, flexible, and creative action. (Davis, Sumara, & Luce-Kapler, 2000, p. 73)

*Nadine: Could you have done this without drawing?*

*Susan: It is survival. You don't have time to try everything. But the idea that we were willing to try some things and take it a step further...in order for our students to grow we had to grow too.*

*Nadine: I think you did gain some knowledge by doing it.*

*Susan: Yes. And also you gain a sense of “This is doable.”* (2nd interview)

Through drawing, the teachers were actively participating in their own learning and understanding of how past experiences influenced their present perceptions. They were risk-taking, undergoing a range of emotions, facing fears about the known and the as-yet-unknown. Dwelling in their collective self-doubt about their drawing abilities in order to entertain the possibility that these perceptions might be challenged. Becoming aware of how our own childhood memories and experiences influence our self-concepts and capabilities as adults alerts us to how assumptions and beliefs about drawing might be formed in the youth we teach. Their awareness of their own learning through drawing enabled them to engage with children and students in light of these experiences and, having confronted their own self-doubts and uncertainty, they were able to gain tolerance for divergent and different ways of learning. Similarly, as students acquire insight into their own drawing experiences, including factors that have facilitated or constrained their drawing activity, their recognition of ways that adults influenced their own developing identities allows them to reflect on qualities that they want to pass on through their practice as teachers.

Drawing in the context of this action research group permitted another (re)presentation of differing points of view and personal experience that could be contrasted, critiqued, learned from, integrated, converged, and interrogated. Rawson (1979) maintains that to create, respond to, and understand drawing, we depend on one great faculty of humankind – analogy. The processes of our experience, from the most commonplace everyday coping with life to the remotest conceptual reasoning, work through the
deployment of analogy. Drawing as metaphor is useful in generating dialogue for in the words of Doll (1993) metaphors "help us see what we don't see. Metaphors are open, heuristic, dialogue-engendering" (italics from original, p. 169). On the other hand,

logic is definitional; it helps us see more clearly that which we already see. It aims for closure, for exclusion. In Serres’ words, ‘it kills.’ We need, of course, both creative imagination and logical definition. We need generation and closure.... It is through the interplay of metaphor and logic that life is lived, experienced, developed. As teachers, we need to bring this interplay into our curriculum constructions. (italics from original, Doll, 1993, p. 169)

4.5.2 Drawing is like “spinach”

Susan: I really don't want to do it. I want to just tell them how to do it. (meeting 3)

[S]urrounded by modes of communication and image-making which are fast, virtual, and relatively easy, drawing seems a remarkably slow, cumbersome, and difficult way to make a visual image; mastery requires effort, skill, focused attention and much practice.

(Montgomery-Whicher, 2001, p. 11)

Few things are impossible to skill and industry.

(Blair, 1918, Example 12)

Susan: This is what I’ve realized – so much of this is choice, you know not doing it, because [drawing] is not on the top of the list. I recognize that other people do this habitually. There is only so much that one can do.

Nadine: And you’d rather not do it.

Susan: It is like spinach. What you choose to eat and what should you eat. (1st interview)

I return to Richard’s sharing of his processes of drawing with pen in meeting 7. He articulated how he dwelled in the struggle associated with trying to draw realistically.

Richard: I wanted to get out of this fear of pen. It makes you think before you mark.... You cannot erase and it changes your thinking.... you and the paper and the object are communicating.... The whole idea is you look and you see more closely.... (meeting 7)
This is one of the main objectives I had for asking them (and myself) to draw as a part of this study – to track the communicating that occurs between medium, hand, eye, head, and object, memory, feeling, and so on. I had hoped they would begin to take up “drawing as a practice” along with practicing drawing in order to increase skills in pictorial realism (Montgomery-Whicher, 2001). As teachers this is a rich enterprise, but it can be paralyzing as well. All of the voices in my head when I picked up a piece of dry pastel overwhelmed me, to the point that I stopped creating for some time. Drawing stopped being a form of escapism. But in the doing as teachers there are so many strategies, problems, questions, judgments, stops and starts, as well as pain that could feed back into their teaching and their understanding of drawing from a student’s perspective. If you can keep the practice going, if you can dwell with that unknowing, possibly to the point of exhaustion, you reveal so much to yourself about process, conceptions of drawing, influences, and possibilities. This is also the reason why I knew I had to draw, even though, like spinach, it was not something I would easily integrate into my life.

Although I was not asking them to take up drawing as a leisure activity, they made it clear it would not top their list of choices for free time pursuits, unlike many of their students.

*Richard: Drawing is not something I do for fun.*

*Deirdre: That is exactly what I said about it. (meeting 2)*

It is intriguing that they made this jump and that I had stopped drawing when it was no longer a relatively mindless escape. There was an assumption for the teachers that drawing was only pleasurable for those (artists) who could do it, coupled with the notion that if they did more drawing, it would become easier, but that there had to be a desire to draw to get over that hump to begin with.
Susan: It is analogous to fitness. You are more fit when you do it more often. People need to do more [drawing] if they want to feel better about it. (meeting 3)

Richard: It started out as hard work. I surprised myself it wasn’t as hard on this last page. It doesn’t have the same joy as reading the Globe and Mail. This whole group endeavor is having its effect. (meeting 7)

And drawing was characterized as a leisure activity or a self-chosen form of expression, not so much as a learning activity. Deirdre in particular explained repeatedly that drawing was not how she chose to express herself. Piano playing and gardening were established ways she found joy and escape.

Deirdre: This drawing is me trying to do my drawing homework. I realized halfway through this – I have had enough of this. If I am spending time, I’d rather be playing piano. It probably took me an hour total. I don’t have a lot of free time and I don’t enjoy it. But later today as I was finishing, I realized I really enjoyed it. And in my art methods course I also really enjoyed the time creating. (meeting 2)

For Richard, his love of reading starting in childhood was his first choice for leisure, while Susan preferred looking at art or watching a performance.

Susan: An interesting thing has come up in both examples. Escapism. What do you use as a form of escape? Maybe some kids run into the woods – that is their form of escape. They don’t want the structure. Kids go where escape will be pleasurable. With the art thing, what I drew did not give me a sense of pleasure, but what other people drew gave me pleasure.

Richard: I can imagine going to an art gallery or reading for hours, but I cannot imagine drawing. I used reading like a heroin addiction. I had to have a book seconds away and that is how I got through most of my school years. Reading was escapism and not drawing. Reading was something I was comfortable with. Saturday I went and got books from librarians. My addiction was supported. (meeting 3)

Our drawing activities early on were attempting to provide some basic practice in conventions of drawing realistically and this was what initially interested them. But confidence through mastery in drawing this way can take time and effort. Practice here is conceived as “a means to an end. The end is mastery” (Montgomery-Whicher, 2001, p. 11).

Richard: The last thing I would ever do is get up and draw.
Nadine: There was no sense of pride or accomplishment?

Richard: Well there was an inkling of that. At the end of the struggle I did see improvement. I haven’t done this in 30 years, but if I did it every day....

Nadine: All that you are trying to do is to demystify a process that you teach every week.

Richard: So by having to draw I am getting to the point that I can say I can make a few improvements. This is hard work. I did realize that by drawing more and more it does get easier...you do get better at it. (meeting 7)

I had thought that drawing for teaching purposes would be viewed as the most valuable purpose for drawing in the group. Going through a drawing assignment prior to or alongside students would help them understand the processes, problems, and potentiality that their students were undertaking. To a certain extent they all acknowledged and made attempts to follow through on this use of drawing in their teaching, but the idea of drawing as a leisure activity, as something artists do, and as an unfavorable encroachment on how they would choose to use their free time kept surfacing for Susan and Deirdre.

Both Susan and Deirdre planned units in drawing that aimed to get students to improve their skills of drawing from observation over time. They recognized that it would take repeated attempts and practice to increase fluency and abilities to concentrate on looking. But this was not taken up in their own drawing practices.

Nadine: You are not going to be doing too much drawing before teaching.

Susan: No.

Nadine: When you draw it is to instruct?

Susan: It is not for self-gratification. (2nd interview)

Susan stopped drawing realistically about halfway through the study. She was proud of her sunset drawing which was “ish” and drawn from
I suspect the joy she had in creating this sunset drawing marked a turning point for her. Realism had less and less of a stranglehold on her in her teaching and in her drawing for teaching. Increasingly she drew from memory for teaching purposes on acetate from her overhead projector in a simplified, "cartoon-ish" fashion.

_Nadine: You relate to your students and you see their needs. You see yourself in your students. If you don't understand, then you are not going to expect them to understand._

_Susan: I have empathy for that. I think that really came through with the frustration in the morphing thing. That was why I wasn't willing to give it up._

_Nadine: You didn't try one. But you did break it down with the ghost on the overhead. They liked it._

_Susan: That was after; they didn't like it at first._

_Nadine: So congratulations for sticking with it._

_Susan: Which I think is a good thing. Not all things are easy. (2nd interview)_

Recognizing that drawing could be hard work and, therefore not a preferred activity for teachers to choose to spend time on outside of the classroom does not negate the merits of stick-with-it-ness in overcoming frustration in learning for Susan's students.

Richard's experience was different. Although drawing from observation was difficult, he recognized that it was getting easier. Moreover, he found a style of creating that actually brought him joy, enough joy that he would choose to pursue creating on his own, separate from the purposes tied into his teaching. While witnessing this was amazing to our group, it seemed to cement the idea that drawing called potential artists and bypassed others. You don't commit to something unless it calls you and is a source of joy. What else was drawing in the end for?

_Richard: The ones I just showed you; the ones I enjoyed and liked doing...I was very, very calm and I could feel my blood pressure lowering. I know it dropped. I could do this all day._

_Nadine: You could take them on your trip._
Richard: I plan to. I am going to take them in my luggage. I spent a fortune on my watercolour box and it is small for travel. (2nd interview)

And I think in Richard’s circuitous path to finding his artistic legs, he had started by grappling with what drawing was, how to render realistically, and committing to overcome fear and pain. He also was allowed to choose what styles of drawing he wanted to pursue. In this journey, we potentially learn about an artist’s coming into being, but we also can better understand how students can find their artistic voice.

4.5.3 A Matter of Time

The pressures of finding time to do it all surfaced whenever the whole group convened. There was not enough time to draw, read the articles, reflect, teach, and so on. Lack of time is a valid concern and common lament for teachers involved in professional development programs in visual art (Lind, 2007; Upitis, 2005). But what I became interested in was when the time excuse, as valid as it is, appeared. Was there a pattern? And when was it not used, did this mean that some things were conceived as more doable?

Time related to drawing was a common coupling. Both Susan and Deidre shared how they could draw when there was “nothing else to do” while at the doctor’s office or at a meeting, but there were always things to do in the classroom.

Image 38: Purse doodle, by Deirdre, ink

To: Nadine
From: Deirdre
Sent: May 31, 2006 6:39:55 AM
Subject: RE: tomorrow
I have been inspired by our discussions and did some sketching while I was bored at the union meeting!
Deirdre

Deirdre: It would never have occurred to me to draw during a meeting. I doodle. But that is new for me. I drew a can and then a purse. I drew two people talking. I drew them in profile because they are easier. I got some ideas for how I might do this with my class. It was interesting because it never would have occurred to me
to do this before. Because I do not consider myself an artist/drawer. Even though I drew a lot in my teens. It was interesting for me that it was hard to listen while I was drawing. Proportion was the hardest thing...I am actually quite happy about these. I feel I captured these people (meeting 5).

Deirdre’s renewed confidence in her drawing did not carry over into a commitment to draw projects before or with her students. Nor did she take this up in her leisure time, which was in limited supply.

Nadine: Will you draw with your students?

Deirdre: It depends on how much time I have. If I thought my drawing would be the best use of my time.... Drawing is not my passion. So I may not.

Nadine: What would you be missing if you didn't draw before or with students?

Deirdre: There might be details that I miss in the project. If you don't try the project you don't always know what is going to happen, but you don't always know in what direction they are going to take it anyway.

Nadine: When you did the drawings for our assignments, you learned in the doing.

Deirdre: Like silent reading, I don't read with the kids. I never do…

Nadine: But you do read aloud to them. If you didn't draw with the students, you'd miss the troubles they might have.

Deirdre: How important do you think it is?

Nadine:....It expands your teaching repertoire…

Deirdre: It might have intimidated and shut me down. I learn so much from my kids and what they do.

Nadine: You do have a point. If they see your work, it might intimidate. But if you come to a teaching event with more experience...Right now you have a limited view, but doing it will give you less of a limited view…
Deirdre: I have a hard time doing what I ask my students to do. We have different agendas. I set their agenda.

Nadine: You are being honest with me.

Deirdre: I am not an art teacher. I have not prioritized it. (1st interview)

I think this was a point I honed in on because if I felt I was able to draw in her linear fashion, I might be more willing to draw in front of my students. The time and materials I use to draw limit what I feel I can draw in front of my class. I enjoy painting with students, but I cannot recall ever drawing in front of a class. Painting with students sets a tone whereby they could witness my decision-making and my belief in the importance of painting. If I were to draw I had the fear that the students would think less of me as an art teacher. But I do think that in revealing my processes, fears, and limitations I could also impact on students in other ways that might help them to expand their ideas of how we draw and the standards by which we measure drawing skill. This was what I had attempted to do in disclosing my hang-ups and preferences associated with my own drawings in the context of this group. It was a worthwhile risk for me, but not for Deirdre. I also wanted to try and uncover why this was not a priority.

Nadine: You are the most confident of the three participants in drawing realistically, but you are the one that least regularly draws with her students...What I realized this afternoon was I think this issue has more to do with me than you. I like to do it along with them, not in front of them.

Deirdre: When you look at Susan and when she draws in front of her class it is in French and for ESL, neither of which I teach. And so I think I might be more likely to teach in front of my students in that situation. I don’t always feel I have enough time. When they are doing art I am either keeping them under wraps or doing something else.

Nadine: But it is not an anxiety, them laughing at you.

Deirdre: No. Off the cuff it is not going to be a “fab” drawing. I do draw sometimes.

Nadine: You drew a leaf in the loupe...you did not do a finished leaf. It might have helped us figure out the pencil and the cats it might have helped us understand how to get them to a more finished point.

Deirdre: I have no argument. It would have helped. It is a matter of time. (2nd interview)
One thing about going to doctor's offices is that they always make you wait...perfect time to sketch....

Image 40: Shoe, by Susan, dry pastel and pencil

Susan: The doctor's office is a good place to draw because there is nothing else to do. Here is my rendition of a shoe in the doctor's office. (meeting 8)

Susan too decided to draw outside of our meetings and while this did not become something she would choose to do, it did become a practice of sorts within her classroom.

Susan: I did try the birdhouse on the board. I am realizing that I should try this before I expect kids to do this. But you don't always have the time. (meeting 9)

Susan found the time to draw on her overhead projector several times during the week for art, French, math, and social studies. She quickly and repeatedly filled up the acetate roll with her images that were predominantly drawn from memory and were used to aid in the comprehension of concepts, illustrate vocabulary words, and explain directions visually. In her words, "My sketchbook is over there" (pointing to the overhead projector). In this, she was the most prolific drawer of the group, finding an alternative time to draw.

Image 41: Susan's "sketchbook"
4.5.4 Drawing Across the Curriculum

Deirdre: For me, art serves other subjects because I don’t feel I can teach music cause I know the steps I know how to do that. I don’t have that in art. I don’t even worry about that it just serves everything else. (meeting 3)

[Elementary generalists] also need to understand art as an inherently interdisciplinary field, whereby it is impossible to teach art well without integration especially with language and social studies. Understanding art as interdisciplinary situates art as a mode of learning as well as a body of knowledge and opens up opportunities to teach art across the timetable.

(Duncum, 1999b, p. 37)

When Richard missed the first meeting of our group, I asked him to share some thoughts on drawing with the group via email since this is what we broadly covered in our meeting. His email and his subsequent sharing of student work and projects reflected his priorities in the teaching of drawing. Drawing cuts across the curriculum and is typically a daily activity, showing up in any content area.

To: The Drawing Group
From: Richard
Date: March 11, 2006 9:16:57 AM
Subject: teaching drawing
Hi Nadine,

Some thoughts on my approaches to teaching drawing
Generally we draw or sketch each day. For example, I make sketches on the board to illustrate a new English word or concept for the ESL kids with very low English language proficiency. The students have to draw a picture to represent the meaning of spelling words. The word is also used in a sentence. The students use generic literature response forms for writers workshops, post read aloud, quiet work while I do guided reading. The forms have a space for webs, sentences and a sketch. In science and social studies the students are asked to incorporate a sketch, paintings, murals, four page booklets with illustrations, wall display boards, (draft research, maps, direct observations of fish or symbols etc., edited written piece, name and sketch of contributing authors in work group). We try and turn all areas of the curriculum into a visual display including math. This is why drawing and sketching is so common in our day. I ask the kids to draw like a scientist and be very accurate because it is not fiction or imaginary but real. Simply draw what your see.... Also, I sometimes ask the students to practice a small section of their picture, for example the eyes, fins, part of a flower etc. The students get ideas for science and social studies drawings from videos, calendar pictures, library book illustrations and posters from the art gallery. This a quick overview of my thoughts on drawing and strategies used in my classroom.

Richard

At our next meeting, this email was brought up and contrasted with how Susan and Deirdre teach.

Susan: When I read your email I was blown away.
Richard: Oh, my email?

Susan: Man, I can't see myself in that role. I cannot make that bridge the way you can.

Richard: I can't do that in music.

Deirdre: There is a difference between primary and intermediate. You have to give a mark at intermediate: a mark for a subject. There is a different slant on things. I use drawing in lots of ways. They draw in their writer's notebooks to develop characters. In science they do field note drawings. I would include marks for that in those subject areas, but not for art. (meeting 2)

Deirdre’s point about the primary and intermediate “slant on things” came up often over the course of the project. In the above quote, Deirdre acknowledged her integration of drawing across the curriculum, but her bottom line was – she marks art separately from the drawing that is “used” in other content areas. (In British Columbia, primary-level visual art is given an evaluative comment [Exceeding, Meeting, or Approaching] once a year, while at the intermediate level, students receive a letter grade every term.) Drawing is used as another form of representing student learning or thinking in other subject areas. This topic will be developed more fully later.

Deirdre had been bringing art and science (as well as art and social studies and language arts) together in projects for several years. She described a group activity that required students to create group patches as a component of a unit that simulated landing on Mars. In another project, students individually constructed and decorated rockets. Both of these were completed for science and were not marked as art.

Deirdre: The patches were not marked. They are part of science and group work. Not art. I am always trying to do science and art together. (meeting 1)

This was subtly shifting over the course of the research project. In discussing the leaf observation unit, she made connections between artists and scientists.

Deirdre: I talked about them drawing as scientists and writers. Art and science and writing, those are people that really look. And they were to imagine they were the scientist that discovered a new plant and they had to do it accurately enough so that there was a record of it. (recorded during school visit, Nov. 1)
Here art was not only used to reinforce learning in another subject area, but it was also a way for students to expand their art knowledge.

Deirdre: I don't like separate things. I think there has been much more of a focus on art for me since I've been doing this project. I have been using art much more I would say.

Nadine: Not so much a handmaiden for science, but art for art's sake.

Deirdre: Whereas before the art was totally serving the other subjects, I have been trying to get the art techniques in there. (2nd interview)

Moreover, the drawings completed for this unit were marked for art.

Deirdre: What I am doing in art is getting them ready for our week at the aquarium. There are other purposes I am using in art.

Nadine: And this is new.

Susan: No.

Nadine: Doing science related stuff for their art mark this is what is different.

Deidre and Susan: Yes.

Deirdre: I have probably done this kind of thing before but not quite to this extent.

Susan: It is shifting. The term melancholy might come up in language arts and then we bring that concept into art – “This picture is melancholy.” I try to bridge. (meeting 9)

4.5.5 Drawing as Meaning Making

Susan: I choose to draw easy things like spiders not Samurai for purposes like for an ESL student. I am okay with that. This is not an art lesson, but for the recognition you need to know these words. (meeting 3)
Susan drew almost everyday in her class on the overhead projector. She called it her sketchbook. These were imaginary drawings or drawings from memory. She drew while teaching a word in French or to ESL students. She drew in math for geometry. She drew in social studies for her mapping unit and in science. She also drew for art to explain perspective, shading, composition, and to clarify the instructions of a lesson. There was more drawing on her overhead roll than writing.

Nadine: Drawing to construct meaning?

Susan: That is important to me. And it is important outside of art class in teaching across the curriculum. I didn't realize that other people didn't do this.

Nadine: And you've done it before this year.

Susan: Yes and I do it even more every year. (2nd interview)

Drawing was a way to teach, to make connections, and enhance meaning.

Image 43: Grade 6 student's social studies test
Susan: Originally I did say that one of the purposes of drawing was to create/make meaning. As I am teaching, that is what I am doing. Connections. Connections. (meeting 11)

During the fall, she took this a step further and required students to draw their understanding of a concept.

Susan: This is social studies. This is the first time I have ever done this. So, I am thinking about how teachers construct meaning through drawing and how students can convey meaning through drawing. So with socials, this is mapping and contour maps. The instructions read: They have to create a diagram that shows they understand and defend their choice with words.

Nadine: How did you come up with this?

Susan: Sort of through the art group. I thought about what we had been talking about. Part of it was - I can describe all the images so there would be some success for understanding. I teach this way: drawing across the curriculum and constructing and conveying meaning, making meaning through diagrams. I had a survey about how they liked it. They all preferred drawing to writing for tests. (Susan post-teaching conversation)

Image 44: Detail of Susan's sketchbook

I often referred to her overhead drawing as fearless. She drew with such frequency and abandon. But when asked to draw from observation or on her own outside of school, she was more anxious and self-conscious. She would continually preface these drawings with the statement: “I am no artist.” I did question her on her belief that an artist has a vision of something in his or her head and has the ability to represent this visually – meaning an artist does not have to look at something to draw it accurately, they can draw from memory. Although her drawings were from memory, they were, in her words, “cartoonish” and therefore, not artistic. I do believe her fearlessness pervaded her classroom and inspired students to “just do it.”

4.5.6 Drawing Related to Being an Artist

I am an artist when I follow a line where it leads me.
I am an artist whenever I look closely at the world around me.
And whenever you listen and search and see,
you are an artist too.

(Lowery, 1992, n.p.)

Susan: It is amazing that someone who is about to retire is willing to change his practices. (2nd interview)

During meeting 5 when I broached the many other ways that drawing could represent apart from the conventions of pictorial realism, Deirdre said that realism was “what kids want” and followed with “it occurs to me that you have to be able to draw realistically in order to be an artist.” I shared that the ability to draw realistically was no longer considered the sole indicator of artistic capability, especially in the diverse contemporary art world. But I agreed that children in the intermediate grades tended to want to improve their realistic drawing skills.

Nadine: How do they come up with that?

Deirdre: I would say if you ask the general public - a good artist is someone who has control.

Susan: Remember how the Impressionists were not accepted? They were a bit out there. An artist has a vision and they need to express that. If you are able to do that vision in a realistic rendering then you are able to go into another realm. These so-called “gurus” can get to another place with their art because they have already been somewhere. (meeting 5)

It was not until Richard shared his own drawings during meeting 9 that the group’s reconsideration of how drawing relates to the practices of artists surfaced.

Richard: I started with this. I was trying to be literal. I don’t like drawing perfectly what things look like.

Deirdre: And that doesn’t mean you are not a good drawer. That is a neat thing to come to.

Nadine: Nor does that mean you are not an artist.

Deirdre: Exactly. (meeting 9)
Richard preferred to draw more “ish” by choice. And it was through that choice that he found the freedom to create for his own purposes, unencumbered by the exactitudes of realism. He was becoming a creator, an artist, with stylistic preferences that allowed him to express more freely than realism. This was key for all of us in the group to witness his journey and to accept him as artist, even though he was not comfortable with realism in his own work.

In our final interview Susan agreed that Richard was an artist.

Nadine: But he wouldn’t consider himself a competent drawer. You do see that you can be an artist and not be a competent drawer?

Susan: Yes, because you can choose to do things that allow you some “ish”… You do your own “ish” thing… He is also more comfortable with pure “ish” or abstraction. (2nd interview)

By meeting 10, when we all considered how our definitions of artists now related to drawing, the ability to draw realistically was no longer the only foundation. For Susan an artist is someone who creates.

Susan: When it comes to being an artist – drawing is one narrow facet of being an artist.

Nadine: Do you need to have drawing as a foundation in order to be an artist?

Susan: I think it would help.

Nadine: Has that changed? We have heard from you “Drawing is really key.”

Susan: When I think back on my stepdaughter’s experience she had the 60’s style of teaching. I think she felt that she was at a disadvantage because she didn’t have certain things in her background. Her portfolio was supposed to be multi-dimensional and she was at a disadvantage to not have the range.

Nadine: That is right; she needed conceptual to realistic. So do you need to be able to draw to be an artist?

Susan: If I reflect back on a recent show at Emily Carr, there was one piece that had a series of bags with fish.
Nadine: So in order to be prepared for that you need diverse experiences painting cats, putting mars bars in pumpkins.

Susan: You have to have some things that transfer and if you were always going to be going off on tangents then you cannot tell a story that connects it all.

Nadine: How does that relate to your teaching from last year to this year?

Susan: I see that hugely. We are doing paragraphs as opposed to sentence fragments. There is some transference and growth and confidence. (meeting 10)

In our final one-on-one interview Susan elaborated on her stepdaughter’s experiences in high school art. There were projects, but little teaching and her stepdaughter felt she was at a disadvantage not having skills in drawing.

Deirdre’s thoughts on artists and drawing added another dimension.

Deirdre: I think an artist has a calling. Art calls them. It is their form of expression. I feel like I have some skill in certain things, but this doesn’t call me. It was the argument I had with my husband over several years. He said I wasn’t much of an artist because I was not composing, but music calls to me; that is where I express myself. I live with two people who felt they were artists they draw; they always draw; it calls to them. When we were camping in the summer I was worried about my son hanging out with the old folks. He just drew and drew. It calls to him. It is his form of expression. (meeting 10)

Upon first hearing this, I thought this conception of an artist having a calling was quite exclusionary and got her as the art teacher off the hook. If her students were going to be called, what role did she play as the teacher?

Nadine: So none of your students are artists?

Deirdre: Many of them may be. I treat them like potential artists.

Nadine: How do we help them find their calling?
Deirdre: Give them many different experiences.

Nadine: Have you always thought this way?

Deirdre: It has been clarified. And it is part of my experience as a teacher, mother, and as a musician.

Susan: You made a comparison between a vocation and a career.

Nadine: Are artists the same way?

Deirdre: Yes.

Nadine: And also in defining herself as a musician.

Deirdre: “You are not a musician because you don’t compose.” Well “Screw you.” Music calls me. To me I am not judging my students as artists or not. “Does it call you? Is it something you want to do further? Then you are an artist. It doesn’t matter what your skill level is.”

Nadine: Initially when you said that I thought it was limiting. Now it seems very inclusive and supportive of students. (meeting 10)

And again, in our last one-on-one interview Deirdre reflected further on this belief.

Deirdre: I don’t think I had clarity around that but through our discussions I got more clarity. I don’t think if you would have asked me a year ago I would have come up with the whole idea of a calling. I think that part of it was Richard changing.

Nadine: But you first talked about this before Richard changed.

Deirdre: But it was reinforced. All of those things together. (2nd interview)

All of these definitions encompassed personal experience and reflection.
For Richard, the notion of artist was multi-faceted. The artist used drawing/painting for different purposes.

Richard: I think an artist is someone who communicates to others. This is influenced by the Riopelle show. The emerald green. It really spoke to me of calmness and warmth and tranquility. Another one. Art is therapy. After I finished the cancer painting, I read this article about how art is being used in hospital settings. Drawing/painting/sculpture is used so the artist or the patient with a disease or emotional pain can work through and heal using art as a vehicle of recovery. And then I think a lot of people use drawing for clarity, to clarify their thinking. I keep going back to Picasso and the hallway. I think he was using drawing to clarify his thinking. After drawing then he worked on the big painting. (meeting 10)

4.6 Limitations and/or Possibilities

Points of discomfort, areas of lack, perturbing hot points can be transformed into points of light we are attracted to and follow (K. Grauer, personal communication, May 18, 2006). To be open to what might be discovered in these risky encounters is to listen to our own fears and the aches that emerge in the presence of others. The following chapter shares how our limitations and/or possibilities were revealed in our teaching, drawing, and researching-in-relation.

4.6.1 Entering the World of Colour

Over the summer both Susan and Deirdre shared that they wanted to learn about drawing together in a more hands on way. Deirdre declared, “I still need to learn about materials. I don’t know the best way to use them. We haven’t discussed media and how we use it.”

Deirdre: It is a whole other thing when you use colour. (meeting 7)

Deirdre and I drew differently in our attempts to capture the world around us.

Deirdre: When I am trying to draw I just imagine everything flat and I just look at the lines of it. I don’t look at the form. I am focusing on the shape.
Nadine: I am a painterly drawer. I am all about building up the illusion of 3d and you can only do that through tone.

Deirdre: I don't know how to handle colour. To do the ovoid, I don't think about the fact that this shape is round. I just see what is there as a flat thing.

Nadine: No one has ever explained that to me. I keep coming up against these draftspersons that can get the outlines so quickly and I am labouring away with my 200 colours trying to get something to look how it is supposed to look.

Deirdre: I am fairly happy with some of the drawing I've done. I think the colour would come next. (meeting 7)

For the most part, her drawings are more linear relying on line to represent what she observes, while my preferred drawing style is more painterly using tone, value, and colour to build up the illusion of form on a two-dimensional surface. She shared in meeting 5 that she did not know how to draw beyond using lines. In my style she saw what she lacked. In my strengths, she recognized her limitations and vice versa.

Nadine: You drew with pen.... I get freaked out with a pen because I know I am going to have too many incorrect lines.

Deirdre: It doesn't matter to me. I am very tentative with my lines. With the purse [Image 38], I had to figure out where the angle of the lines are. I was thinking rather than looking. I was pretty happy with it.

Nadine: Did you draw the outline first, like you learned in grade 9?

Deirdre: It never occurred to me to do the outline first or the basic shapes. I just did it in sections.

Nadine: I start with bigger areas and then go to smaller. I am not a linear drawer. I am more painterly.

Deirdre: I have no idea to do something that is not line. (meeting 5)

I have often said over the past year that I am petrified of lines. The finitude and exactness of communicating through getting that one perfect outline was something I did not feel I had enough practice in. Early on in my art classes I opted for layering and areas of colour and tone in representing an
observed landscape, figure, or still life. No one had told me so, but I knew I was not a great draftsperson and I assumed that I had started drawing too late to overcome my lack of skill without committing to years of practice. Instead, I just drew the way I was comfortable with and for the most part, avoided linear drawing. I became a colourist and this then grew into how I approached painting too. I think my use of dry pastels and conté is synonymous with the processes of painting. Painting took over and was the most enduring of the art media I used as an artist outside of formal education. On the other hand, Deirdre is happy to draw lines taking on an observed reality in sections, but did not know what to do beyond draw with lines.

Deirdre decided to tackle colour through her teaching of drawing. She remembered a pansy project she had done a few years earlier where she brought in pansies and asked students to sketch them in pencil before drawing them in chalk pastel. She was surprised "how few got it," meaning how they "Couldn't look at a pansy and make a drawing that looked like a pansy." "There is the blue, yellow, and white centre with black lines, and incredible detail, but what I got was a purple blob." This was a unit on looking closely as a scientist.

When Deirdre shared her frustration with this project during our second group meeting, Richard revealed how he gets students to draw from flowers (see Image 19). "We practice with little studies to get ready for the big one. Whatever the subject.... Then their final sketch looks very complete." Deirdre responded that they had sketched the face of the flowers first, to which Richard asked, "What if the time for sketching had been doubled?"

Deirdre: That might have helped but I might have had to do it all year. (meeting 2)

By meeting 6 Deirdre shared: “I’m thinking back to the pansy project and I’m thinking how I could have broken it down. Do some colour project with a petal. I would do it in a much different way.”
Deirdre practiced capturing the colour of leaves using chalk pastel prior to teaching. This unit integrated a lot of goals for her art teaching. Firstly, her class would be attending a weeklong program at the aquarium where they would start each day observing a tank. This would include drawing and observation. Science and art intersected here. Students were “looking like scientists” while practicing their drawing and observation skills. Working in sketchbooks as they did in their field notes for science and in their writer’s notebook for language arts, Deirdre shared: “I told them the story about the Picasso and the practice sketches hallway” (meeting 7). She got them to focus on edges, tips, and outlines while undertaking multiple, timed sketches in pencil. Colour was the next step.

Deirdre: What I noticed is early finishers asked if they could colour and when I looked at them they were not the right colour. They just took the green pencil crayon out and coloured green. This made me realize that this was a component that I needed to look into further. So we thought about how we could get them to improve. So I tried to get the colour of this leaf. And if you hold up a leaf to light you get different colours too – I learned this from the kids. (meeting 7)
She had collected pastel boxes for years and had not even opened most of them before this project. She was not sure of “the best way to use them” and went about practicing on her own, even taking books out of the library to learn more about the medium. Deirdre shared the following with her class at the start of the colour portion of her unit.

Deirdre: Today we are going to experiment with colour. I realize nobody talked to me about colour; I didn’t know what to do with colour. When Miss Kalin and I have been talking about art, I like to draw with lines first and she likes to use colour and shading first. And I’ve always been a little afraid of colour. So you are going to help me get over this. And what I noticed the first day about colour, it was hard to get the right colour. A couple of people asked “Can I colour this?” and I noticed that people would pull out a green and colour the whole thing green. So sometimes the green doesn’t match and there are different areas, so you really have to look. Holding leaves up to the light also changes what it looks like. You are going to do some experimenting with colours. I wanted contrasting coloured leaves. Is there one colour on these leaves? No…Depending on how the light hits something in nature and if that thing has shape you will always see different colours. Anything in nature will always have variations in colour.
In this excerpt she is revealing to students her history with colour, how she draws and how there are different ways to draw, what her fears are as a drawer, her role as co-learner, how students’ practices were the basis for her teaching, and what she is coming to understand about colour. She was finding her way in relation.

4.6.2 Why Colour Cats?

I began the list with expressionism because, despite stated goals, judging from the artwork I see produced in schools throughout the country, student are often not given sufficient opportunities to make artworks that are not tightly controlled by realist or formalist parameters.

(italics from original, Gude, 2007, p. 12)

To: Nadine  
From: Deirdre  
Sent: October 14, 2006 11:03:48 AM  
Subject: New idea  
i have an idea for a new art project. Check out www.whypaintcats.com.  
Deirdre

To: Deirdre  
From: Nadine  
Subject: RE: New idea  
Date: Sat, 14 Oct 2006 22:49:35 -0700  
i am familiar with this book. this is not my forte or my suggested route but it is a hoot.  
nadine
Deirdre was looking for something to do that was quick and somewhat related to Halloween. Inspired by the book *Why Paint Cats* (Silver & Busch, 2006), she decided to get students to disguise cats by colouring them to resemble something else and by colouring them abstractly in shapes and patterns. The project involved Deirdre making different outlines of cats for the students to choose from and colour. She asked the students to look at a copy of the book for inspiration. In this book, a play on another book called *Why Cats Paint* (Busch & Silver, 1994), artists explain why and how they paint their own cats.

This choice shocked me because it did not seem connected to her previous leaf unit. However, it did cover colour mixing using the same colour pastels from the leaf unit. It was prioritizing the imagination and personal expression, which are usually a component in Deirdre’s vision of a balanced art program over any given year. It was open-ended, expressive, and built on the colour explorations they had done in their leaf observation unit.

The first artists that Deirdre ever brought into her art program were these artists that paint cats. I think this disturbed me and helped me realize my limited definitions of contemporary art that were intertwined with some distinctions between what constitutes high and low art. The painted cats project embraced self-trained artists in ways I was uncomfortable with. But this has been a facet of contemporary art for several years now. Initially I was unwilling to see the contemporary, the post-modern, that was right before me. I had my own notions of contemporary art that prioritized issues-based, largely representational, and narrative works. Even though I advocated an expansive definition of drawing, it became evident that I too had my limits.

My initial judgment was the book and practice of painting cats were not in the realm of art. Once I got a hold of myself I was able to recognize it as a form of “outsider” art that might be on the margins of the art world, but visual culture fit to be studied none-the-less. In my attempts to beef up the art content I thought this pushing of the boundaries between high and low art would make for an interesting conversation, as would the exploration of what constitutes an artist. I saw this also as an opportunity to contrast the idea of artist as scientist to artist as transformer, provocateur, outsider, or satirist. She could have also looked at
humour in art and how artists have used irony to expose an art world that does indeed take itself too seriously at times (which she later used to justify the project [see below]). I also suggested she look at the markings on unpainted cats to talk about pattern and tone. I encouraged her to think about transformation and the ways artists can transform. She could look at types of lines and shapes and how those can be used to make pattern.

Image 51: Coloured cat, grade 5 student, oil pastel

I also interpreted it as a step back into what she characterized as typical in her art program prior to participating in our group when she would pull ideas “out of the cupboard to have fun with.” This emphasis on enjoyment came out of her feeling as if she did not have “a place where I step-by-step could teach them something.” Furthermore, I was struck by the fact that the first artist Deirdre ever brought into her art program outside of picture book illustrators was the artists who paint cats.

I wanted a bit more contextualization of this “fun” activity and she was not taking my advice. Just prior to a classroom observation on the morning of October 16, I stated that I did not feel she was willing to take up my suggestions. This would be a point in the study where I could explore my reactions in relation to this project. It was one of several instances during the study where I was not in control, where my input was respectfully ignored. During the subsequent group meeting I shared the following reflection:

“There was one time with the cats where I didn’t know what to say. My baggage and my art history left me stuck. And I started to say something about something and you said, ‘I don’t think I am going to go in that direction.’ My response was ‘I don’t think I know how to help you.’ I was just going to be there and stand back and learn.”

Deirdre’s stance symbolized her taking control of her art program, which I was evidently somewhat reluctant to champion. Was it that I did not think Deirdre was taking this seriously enough, or using me as
a resource in the way I wanted her to, or validating my art knowledge? The following email seemed to only exacerbate my feelings.

To: Nadine  
From: Deirdre  
Sent: October 16, 2006 7:48:52 PM  
Subject: RE: why we paint cats  

To clarify what I meant about liking Why paint cats - I dislike the people who go too far in taking themselves seriously when discussing ART. You are not in that group. I also hate it when musicians take themselves too seriously in discussing MUSIC. But that is different from knowing what children need to learn to sing in tune. So my liking the book is not a criticism of you! Deirdre

(This justification of the project was not shared with the students.)

I think I felt that whatever the group members undertook in their art class was my responsibility or at least would be a reflection on me as an art educator. So the feeling this instilled in me was a mixture of fear and disappointment and offense. As Deirdre proclaimed at our next group meeting, “I freaked out Nadine” and she had. This point of tension was something I mulled over and continue to think on. Was it that the activity lacked art content in my opinion or that she did not take my advice or both? I do recall saying to teachers in training “There are no bad ideas in curriculum planning. What counts is what you do with that idea.” I really do not know if that is true in every instance but suffices to say that I prided myself on getting more art “off of the bone” in my consultation around lesson planning. But my “powers” were not working with Deirdre.

She was eclectically integrating a variety of artistic traditions including formalism and expressionism with a contemporary art form. At the same time she was incorporated practices and perspectives that were outside of a singular focus on museum and gallery fine art. She was not out to placate me or wait for her program to be endorsed by an expert. This art curriculum, created by Deirdre, could be viewed as falling within the evolving parameters of what I (and others) have articulated as a post-modern art curriculum. It just took me a while to interpret this project within a post-modern frame.

I notice now that I wrote, “this is not my forte or my suggested route” in the above email as if I was in charge of her decision-making in art. In Susan and Richard’s classrooms I had been a co-teacher and mentor. They asked for and took quite a bit of my advice before and during their art classes. I was less active in Deirdre’s class and she really saw me as observer. Deidre is fiercely independent and takes pains toward crafting a curricular plan that makes sense to her. “Art as calling” for Deirdre translates into providing students with a variety of experiences including those that are fun.
In my teaching of art, fun was rarely a top priority. It was a serious endeavor of in-depth study. The pushing of boundaries was important, taking risks, as well as learning from a variety of art forms both inside and outside of the western canon. Perhaps fun was what was missing from my art program. Maybe I was one of those people Deirdre described as taking themselves “too seriously” in relation to art. I seldom took on art projects that were expressionistic, without these projects being, as Gude (2007) observes, “tightly controlled by realist or formalist parameters” (p. 12). At the conclusion of the cat project I asked the class which drawing activity they preferred – the observational leaf drawing or the cats, and the majority liked the cat project better. I also asked them what they still wanted to learn in drawing. Every member of Deirdre’s class still wanted to learn to draw realistically.

4.6.3 All the Artists Have Been Done

Deirdre: Part of the reason I don’t bring in other artists’ work is that it is done so often in other grades. So it has all been done. I’ll do my own thing.

Nadine: They have all been done?

Deirdre: The ones that are easy to get things for; that are the common ones. (meeting 10)

During meeting 11 we brought in drawings that were not based on observation. Deirdre took the opportunity to attempt a drawing based on a memory of a painting she had seen as a young adult.

Image 52: Drawing of a favourite painting by Deirdre, dry pastel
Deirdre: What I wanted to do was one of my absolute, all-time favourite paintings in the Winnipeg Art Gallery. It is this enormous painting in points. There are shapes and a similar colour throughout. It is huge and could almost fit that whole wall. In my 70’s dream I used to have my whole room covered with this painting.

When I mentioned that this seemed similar to a drawing project she had been talking about over the fall and asked if she would do a similar project with her students, she did not know if she would be able to.

Image 53: Sketch of art project idea, by Deirdre, pencil

Deirdre: I hadn’t really, until I started talking here, I hadn’t really put together where it came from. I had this sort of idea. And then I realized that it was the painting at the Winnipeg art gallery. (meeting 11)

Sensing an opening, I went further.

Nadine: Have you ever looked it up on the internet?

Deirdre: I haven’t tried. I haven’t thought about that. (meeting 11)

Nadine: In your classrooms you are doing work that artists are or have been doing in the past. It starts with a google search. And having it being open-ended should be of interest to you.

Deirdre: I am not saying that. I just tend to do something else because the other classes do artists. (meeting 11)

For Deirdre “something else” had amounted to not bringing in artists’ works. The first artists that Deirdre brought into her art program were the artists that paint cats. Her way into this art form was humour and colour. As she shared in an email: “I didn't go looking for the cat project – it found me. I just happened to
see the books which were new to me, and I was impressed with the whimsy.” She did not have a teacher’s
guide and she was able to create a project inspired by the website and book, *Why Paint Cats* (Silver &
Busch, 2006). The information provided by these resources was understandable enough for her to feel that
she had an idea of the techniques, styles, motivations, and possibilities that gave her enough comfort to
take this leap.

In meeting 12, I again asked about connecting her other projects to artists’ works.

*Nadine: Richard had a resource on Mondrian* [Tang, 2003]. *You didn’t use it step-by-step, but it was your
jumping off point…. Artists have been looking at nature for a long time. Certainly what you [Deirdre] have been
doing with the leaves…scientists and artists have been doing close looking for a long time. I think you can make
an attempt to give what you are doing more of an artistic context. In this way you don’t have to know the artist,
just use the image.*

Not one of the participants picked up on this (on their own [see section titled *Morphed Expectations*)] in
our subsequent interviews or in their teaching. Any discussion about using artists in their teaching relied
on using one artist or artists (as in the case of the Group of Seven) and having a fair idea of the artist’s
biography and style in order to develop a unit. Although Richard did concede in our final interview, “It is
probably okay to put up a variety of artists and not know the artists and their biographies” this is
something that never occurred to him. There appears to be this pressure to really feel comfortable and
“know” an artist before teaching with his or her artwork. It reminds me of when I first started to consider
using non-western art in my classroom. There was initially a paralysis around not knowing enough about
a particular culture to teach about it. When you start and it becomes a priority, you just slowly learn more
and more. You cannot know everything. Even for Susan, who knows a lot more about Canadian art than I
do, there remained reluctance. She did not feel she could explain the “how” behind the works, although
she could confidently explain the “why” and the context of their creation in our group.

*Nadine: There is this gap between the art world and the classroom. We may like to bring it in, but if we don’t
have the manual, we cannot bridge the gap.*

*Susan: It is not unlike teaching anything. If you do not have access to good tools, you cannot do a lot of it.*

*Nadine: There is the internet. You can ask me. But there is still a gap.*
Susan: I agree. (meeting 12)

I repeatedly brought in contemporary artists to discuss drawing practices, themes, and interpretation. This was probably the most frustrating thing I did, both for me and the other participants. When reflecting on this during an interview with Susan I stated, “I would bring in my contemporary drawing books, and the groups’ response was, ‘that is great, but let’s get back to reality’” (2nd interview). I attempted to make connections between the observational processes in both Deirdre and Susan’s drawing projects with scientific studies of nature from the previous centuries and works done this century that focused on capturing nature with high detail and realism. I was trying to make artworks useable in order to further contextualize their programs and the historical basis of their priorities. But these connections were not taken up; at least not in the directions I had anticipated.

Susan had small images of Canadian artists in her room, but never referred to them, even though her focus on realism and structures were mirrored in the works. Susan did not make that connection. She was paralyzed by how one would teach this without asking them to simply copy, how she could break it down, and where she would get larger images. She also could not see herself touring a group of students through a museum. “This reminded me of teachers that like say ‘Let’s study Lawren Harris.’ ‘Here are the techniques and let’s make our own Lawren Harris’. Why don’t I do that? I don’t even feel comfortable at that. I see that others are successful at it; I need to cross that bridge. Cause it is not too far from the gallery, the poster, the book – ‘Ok, now you try it.’” She admitted that she did not know where to start, how to take these works apart and teach the techniques used by the artists. Instead her focus was within the comfort of projects that were more “step-by-step.” In order to work with the Canadian art she was so passionate about Susan admitted, “There needs to be more jumping off points for me for sure.”

In putting forth the idea that teachers could use artists’ works in their classrooms, there are numerous obstacles I had not considered. I relate this to my reading of Duncum’s (1999b) article entitled “What Generalist Art Teachers Need to Know to Teach Art Well” in which he suggests a variety of learning strategies for making and responding to art for the elementary generalist that are based on what he called “the most basic content in art” (p. 34). These strategies assume that teachers can judge, respond to, develop questions around, perceive, and find appropriate works of art. It is taken for granted, not only in these strategies, but also in my presentation of artworks within the group meetings, that these non-art specialist teachers of art have enough exposure to and confidence with these concepts and practices to create rich art viewing and responding experiences for their students. For these teacher-participants, this was a stretch too far.
Deirdre: I wouldn’t mind something I could pick and choose from…If there is a particular project, what I find is it is nice to have something that explains it. (meeting 10)

I have to admit, when I develop curriculum, I too search a variety of resources – the library, internet, teaching books, textbooks, and videos. It is not that teachers may be reluctant to start from scratch; it is that there is so little that breaks it down in an understandable/teachable format. Without the art background, the personal interest, experience with materials and processes, or exposure to works, curriculum development is difficult.

Nadine: Last meeting Deirdre said, “all the artists have been done”, and you meant the artists that have prepared materials. Not all this stuff has been digested and prepared for you. A lot of these are just images. There will be a lot of grey area.

Deirdre: When you don’t have expertise, when you do not have an art history degree…In music I can make up my own units and blow people away.

Nadine: You are a curriculum developer.

Deirdre: But not in art. (meeting 11)

A survey of our local children’s bookstore reflects the artists and styles that are predigested for students and that make their way into typical elementary programs. There are multiple books focusing on Leonardo da Vinci, Monet, Van Gogh, Matisse, Picasso, Piet Mondrian, the Group of Seven, Emily Carr, Jackson Pollock, and Andy Warhol. These picture books contain images, biographies, and explanations of art processes and concepts that are readily understandable and can become the basis for teaching. While resources such as picture books relay the message that these are the only artists worth learning about, this can fill a gap for the educator. It is a safety net and a starting point.

Now, I return to Deirdre’s “all-time, favourite painting” touched on in the opening of this section. In the early fall, Deirdre shared that she wanted to explore colour and line through teaching a project similar to the one from her grade nine art class that had such an impact on how she sees the world (for a comparable project see Steele, 2006, p. 93). Late in the study, through our group conversations and her own personal reflection, she began to put together another source for this idea. The project from her high school art class related to a painting she had viewed in early adulthood at the Winnipeg Art Gallery.
Deirdre: What I realized is that I had forgotten about this guy. The thing that I had done in high school was connected to what he did here, intersecting lines and patterns. And it was probably why it spoke to me so much when I originally saw it. I was in grade 9 and then I saw it in the new art gallery...

Image 54: Detail from Deirdre’s Me Map

Nadine: She was talking a lot about it all fall.

Deirdre: and then I just went, of course. Because I had forgotten about this. (meeting 12)

She recalled that this piece was by Lionel Lemoine Fitzgerald, a contemporary of the Group of Seven. In his later works, Deirdre shared that he was using “the same kind of line thing that I always talked about and I never realized it was the same thing.” “I hadn't thought of that Lemoine Fitzgerald painting for years. I had kept a card reproduction of it...but don't have it now.” He had abstracted from nature using line and areas of colour applied in a pointillism style. She was extremely excited about this connection and it propelled her to do further research finding an example and description of one of his works in the Glenbow Museum collection, gathering imagery, and mapping out an unit integrating line, her new-found understanding of value, tone, and colour. She would create a unit around an artist’s works, without the safety net of a pre-packaged curriculum, just as she had done with the colouring cats project. And for the first time, she would share a passion for the artist and his works that had so inspired her early on. She was finding her way through making connections to her past.

The integrating of artists’ works into curriculum was based on personal interest, knowledge of the artist’s background, and confidence in the techniques of creation. These were key points. For all three, while artists and artworks had turned them on to art, they needed more than just the images to integrate artists’ works into their teaching. Richard and now Deirdre were bringing their personal viewing experiences into their classrooms and exposing their students to sources that were of interest and that might just potentially turn their students on as well.
Deirdre: I think there are certain ideas in art I do not have clear. I also think it is such a complicated thing. When you say "tone" it doesn't quite resonate to me exactly what that means. There are words that just don't make sense to me. If it were "shading", I'd understand them more. I understand them in a musical context but not in an art context. (meeting 9)

Elementary generalist teachers need to grasp art in terms that are tailored to their particular circumstances.

(Duncum, 1999b, p. 36)

During my last interview with Deirdre, I got onto the topic of her integrating more responding and perceiving in her art classes. I was able to make an analogy to her sharing of poetry and writing with her students in Writing Workshop where students respond to particular elements of writing as a class.

Nadine: What you do with poetry is a lot like showing artworks. It is so parallel. I can see you putting up an image and....

Deirdre: When you put it that way... it is just so clear to me now. I see those connections. (2nd interview)

Deirdre was not alone in this type of connection. As mentioned earlier, Richard had related preparatory sketches in art to the writing process. Susan saw links between how she taught math and language arts content "in chunks" with ways she could break down the teaching of drawing. They were instinctively associating the teaching of drawing to how they taught other subject areas. Viewing the teaching of drawing through a general pedagogical lens, they were able to build off their teaching expertise in other curricular areas.

When I asked Richard if he was irritated by our somewhat open-ended drawing assignments for the group meetings wherein we would draw around a theme at home and bring back our own strategies, problems, questions, and connections to the next meeting, Richard related this to Wassermann and Ivany’s (1988, 1996) play / debrief / replay method of teaching science.

Nadine: How frustrating has it been to have open-ended assignments...

Richard: I like them.
Nadine: ...and then integrate your problem solving?....

Richard: You know what? A million years ago we did this thing called “play, debrief, replay”. I put all of my student teachers through the “free play” first and that takes time. The students gather together and learn from each other.

Nadine: The free play was the basis for my directed instruction in our drawing assignments.

Richard: We call them discoveries. “So and so discovered something wonderful.”

Nadine: So you do that with art?

Richard: Sometimes. I like that science model and I use it for a lot of things.... And it is also from the primary program – that open-endedness. (1st interview)

I picked up on this in our last interview. Had he taught through this method over the fall?

Richard: Not in art. It is a science model.

Nadine: Your student teacher did it with the wire exploration last spring.

Richard: With the wire it worked well. They would explore and then come back and get some direct teaching. But in painting it is hard because we don’t all work on a project at once. See, now… that you have brought this up we could. The reason was watercolour brushes and paper are in finite supply.

Nadine: It didn’t happen because the materials were precious.

Richard: But also I wasn’t thinking about it. And with the wire – it kind of fit with my preconceived notions of “play, replay.” And we had been thinking about those connections in science. And this year I didn’t see those connections with the watercolour.

Nadine: Because you are certainly doing that in regards to process. Stopping in mid-process and talking about what they learned.
Richard: It was there unconsciously. It was not a pure “play, replay”. (2nd interview)

It was Deirdre’s reaction to my comparing art to poetry that helped me to realize that I too had missed numerous opportunities to relate aspects of the participants’ teaching of other subject areas to the ways they could teach drawing. I had failed to capitalize on their understanding of teaching across subject areas. I recognize this aspect in particular as me perceiving them as deficit, in a way, fueling their own fears and preconceptions of what it meant to teach art well. I was buying into their defeatism, their proclamations that they did not know what they were doing and they needed to be fixed. They were tabular rasas waiting to be inscribed with my ideas. I was blinded to the meaningfulness of their experiences in other subject areas. As Duncum (1999b) articulates, we were denying and/or resisting rather than attempting to work from within the conditions and expertise in both generic and specific teaching skills that these seasoned elementary generalists possessed. The teaching of drawing can be conceptualized separately from teaching math and science, for example, or it can build from similar philosophies and experiences. This was after all how I had learned to teach a variety of subject areas. Having only been trained as a K-12 art teacher I had to pull from those experiences and practices to create ways of teaching all of the other content a generalist elementary teacher has to teach. I could have connected this to Susan’s extensive background in business education and Deirdre’s history teaching music. How did those experiences transfer or help them to understand the teaching of other subjects? What a missed opportunity.

Nadine: Me bringing up your strengths would be another way in for you that I should have done more of. Poetry is language and response, just as art is.

Deirdre: It is all about time. (2nd interview)

4.6.5 Discussion as Learning

When Richard heard that the early morning light reflecting into my kitchen created a number of colours in my rendition of a ping-pong ball he reflected that in teaching this explanation would only surface if he interviewed each child in his class. At that point he could only envision using one-on-one conferences to “fill in these gaps” between the intention and decision-making behind a student’s art and what Richard himself was expecting or envisioning an artwork to end up looking like. Instead of interviewing each child, Richard began to use reflective writing by student artists that could provide insights into the whys behind their products.
When I stated that the provincial curriculum resource guide for visual art at the elementary level included the content organizer “responding” during meeting 6, a discussion of the use of language in art teaching ensued. Richard shared that this focus followed “what they do at the Richmond Art Gallery about talking about an artwork.” I added that it could also include students talking about their own and each other’s work. Susan responded with: “This is idealistic. There is no way I can realistically have a conversation with every member of the class. And how do I assess conversation?”

*Nadine:* Part of what we are doing [in the group] here is talking about what we have done. And it is incredibly important to break down the mystery of what it is to draw.

*Susan:* I am dealing with a different knowledge base. And this is out of my comfort level. This is way over my head. *(meeting 6)*

For the group, discussion and sharing among colleagues was paramount. But this mode of learning was not apparent in Deirdre and Susan’s classrooms.

I found another opening to return to perceiving and responding during our ninth meeting while Susan was sharing students’ drawing of pinecones. It occurred to me that each student had a particular style of capturing a pinecone and I asked if Susan might have a discussion around how students came up with their drawings in an effort to encourage them to learn from each other.

*Susan:* I wouldn’t have a 45 min. discussion.

*Nadine:* I am asking about a sharing moment.

*Susan:* It would be the same as always; the one quiet girl wouldn’t talk.

*Nadine:* But she would see.

*Susan:* She would see. But still some students would talk and others would remain quiet. *(meeting 9)*

Susan had believed in using her students as teachers in drawing and often relied on the “talented” student(s) to act as resources for those that struggled. I suggested that she had 30 different ways to make
pinecones in her class and that “Sending everyone to Patrick [a particularly good drawer] is cool, but there are other things going on.”

Susan: I see what you are saying too. “Don’t send my learning disabled kid to Patrick to get fixed up.” He probably would learn something from someone just a step ahead of him.” (meeting 9)

Susan disclosed that over the course of the study “I’ve been sending kids to go and look at each others’.”

Admittedly, Susan’s program was about making and not looking or responding. But during the study, this was slowly changing. Initially through my urging, Susan integrated an art walk into her teaching, whereby students walked around the room and looked at each other’s work. Later, while I was observing her teaching, she chose to do this on her own. Before arriving for our last interview she shared, “I had a mental choice. It was 10 minutes to three and I asked myself, ‘do I want to do a walkabout or do I want to get the class to write a thank you to Miss Kalin?’” Art walks were now on her “repertoire radar” among the choices she could pull from in teaching art.

Richard had more discussion and response to student/artist artwork. He had learned about art walks from his sponsor teacher during his practicum decades ago. Typically art walks occur at the end of a lesson, but during our study Richard embraced students responding to each other’s work and the sharing of their own decision-making mid-way through a lesson so that students might learn from each other while in the midst of creating.

His reliance on a paint station limited the opportunities for discussion since it might take up to three weeks for his entire class to rotate through the painting station. After taking his class to a program at the Richmond Art Gallery during our project, he was able to provide each table with paint dishes and watercolour brushes so that every student would paint at the same time. This fostered more talk about process and product. These sessions focused on particular conceptual, historical, biographical, and stylistic aspects of an artist such as Piet Mondrian and Jackson Pollock. Richard has used writing in conjunction with artists’ biographies and styles for years, incorporating a chart of key words and asking students to reflect on the lives and styles of artists through writing. Ted Harrison is a favourite for Richard especially since his website is “kid friendly” and there are numerous books and films to create a unit from. An artist such as Jackson Pollock was more of a challenge because of the lack of appropriate resources for children.
For his Mondrian unit students were asked to consider how abstract shapes could represent something and even tell a story. Richard admitted that although there had always been language integrated into his art lessons, the nature of the discussions in art had evolved during his participation in this study. During my observations of his class there were multiple process discussions around how students drew or painted as well as discussion prior to actually starting an art process. When students used watercolours, Richard asked them to reflect on what it was like to paint with watercolour brushes. He also created reflection sheets that asked students to write about their processes and experiences as artists. This was a departure from writing that responded to the work or life of an artist the class was studying as a whole.

On numerous occasions, Richard referred to his students as artists while teaching and had done this prior to our study. But the nature of the discussions has changed to be more of a response to images and processes. Students’ perspectives as artists have increasingly been incorporated. He attributed this to the study group discussions.

Deirdre did not have students formally discuss each other’s art, but she recognized that “there is much informal looking and discussing” (via email). During the leaf observational drawing unit I was amazed at the variety of images, details, colours, styles, and strategies students were demonstrating in their leaf studies. While observing her teaching I asked: “Was there any talk about what was learned in this experimenting? Because it occurs to me that there is a wealth of knowledge that could be shared.”

With that question as a perturbation, Deirdre asked students about which medium they preferred – pencil crayons, oil pastels, or chalk pastels – through a vote. She then asked, “Does anybody want to share something they learned about the type of media?” Student voice was incorporated into this lesson; Deirdre was not the only voice or teacher of art. I also asked if she might get students to reflect in their sketchbooks about what they would like to improve and which students’ work they admired. Their written reflections were not as detailed as their sharing in pairs and in front of the class, which demonstrated sensitivity while revealing some of the problems and decision making that went on during their drawing. They came up with solutions to each other’s problems and shared their own discoveries from working with the media. Deirdre commented that they are a “very verbal group.” I found this group sharing very powerful and I suspect a lot of learning passed between students.

During our last interview, Deirdre shared that she would be willing to experiment with more student voice in her art lessons, but that there was always this pressure to have something on the wall to show to parents and so little time to devote to this over a term, meaning that discussion and responding to images could
take a lot of time away from project work. When I suggested she could have language related to art and responses to artwork on the wall, she still insisted she wanted images up for parents and she needed “something to mark”.

Nadine: I think for you, you are putting your time and effort towards project logistics not connecting, discussing...

Deirdre: It comes out of a lack of time and pressure to have something on the wall and something to mark.

Nadine: You are more focused on how are we going to do this and the product as opposed to opening space for language development and response.

Deirdre: September then October and you got to have a mark. (2nd interview)

4.6.6 Pencil-Pushing and Drawing Dangerously

Age alone does not render instructional approaches obsolete. Much art of the past speaks to us today, and traditional art exercises may be useful in understanding it. (Gude, 2000, p. 76)

Nadine: We do not teach other subject areas the way we did over a century ago, so why should the teaching of drawing adhere to historical and outdated practices? (meeting 10)

Richard: Without my art methods course I don’t know how to teach drawing … step-by-step.

Nadine: So the goal in drawing would be realism?

Richard: I guess. If that is what the “art guy” says: “Grade 3 kids will draw an onion. Here are the 25 steps,” you would do it. But I wasn’t taught anything in my art methods course. So I’ve been fudging it for my entire career. (meeting 2)

We need to better understand those curricular texts we create, mediate, and embody in our classrooms, language, and experience. Like any text or work of art, these texts are open to interpretation and rich with possibilities for all who can see and feel. (May, 1995, p. 84)

The teachers struggled with not having a sequenced curriculum model for teaching drawing. They assumed it was out there – that “one right way” – and that I must know what that would entail. Although I had hopes of the directions our learning might venture into, I was conscious of a need to not provide them
with a tightly woven, prescriptive set of practices they could insert into their art programs. This is not to say that I was even capable of or motivated to provide such a “readerly” text (Barthes, 1974) in the form of a drawing curriculum that was inline with current thinking in the field of art education for them to negotiate. Instead I gave them some starting points in drawing through exploration and explanation of the conventions of drawing realistically – such as tone, line, shape, proportion, but I would repeatedly qualify these as just one way into drawing.

It was not until meeting 10 that I shared a particularly “readerly” drawing manual that covered the basic conventions of drawing from two-dimensional images in a sequential and rigidly outlined process. (A “writerly” text is considered a work in progress whereas a readerly text is a static product. The reader is invited to be an active participant in the construction of meanings. The text is open to multiplicity instead of stable meaning.) I asked them to complete an exercise from a Vancouver edition of a Canadian drawing manual from 1918 (Blair) where they copied a two-dimensional line drawing of a leaf. It was book three of the intermediate grades series. This drawing manual was reminiscent of those drawing programs available in the United States and England in the 1800s. This sample drill and practice program for K-12 education was intended to prepare students for work in the manufacturing industries. Students were trained in freehand drawing and drawing from memory. I also showed them another manual from 1924 (Scott), which outlined what was to be covered in each primary grade at any given week of a school year. The sequential curriculum in drawing included work in crayon, pencil, as well as ink for grade 1.

Image 55: Richard’s “Freehand Drawing from Nature,” Example 4

Kimmelman (2006) has called these manuals courses in “pencil-pushing” wherein drawing promoted discipline, dexterity, and meditation. In reaction to this approach to teaching drawing and in response to
changes in modern art and society, there was a move away from the rules of draftsmanship towards a focus on individual expression, self-esteem, and child-centered teaching. These two mindsets related to drawing are legacies that remain with us today and are tied up in definitions of drawing skill, talent, and what it means to be an artist.

*Nadine: I actually think we still carry this with us in our teaching, definitions of drawing, and conceptions of talent in drawing.*

*Deirdre: Totally.*

*Nadine: Even in this group. (meeting 10)*

*Nadine: But this stuff is still swirling around in my life and yours…. I cannot draw from memory. I don’t have the style of drawing where I cannot draw without something in front of me. The intent of this book is that you can walk away and draw a leaf from memory. I cannot do that so I’ve always thought that I am not talented because I have all this baggage.*

*Richard: This allows you to practice so that you can draw from memory.*

*Nadine: I can draw from memory; I am therefore able to draw. Wrapped up in our definitions and self-concepts.*

*Richard: I would hope not. I think there is more to being an artist than that.*

*Deirdre: But when my students look at each other’s work they are definitely good artists based on how they can complete those tasks. (meeting 10)*

By this time in the study, they had writerly responses to the manual critiquing its reliance on two-dimensional examples and its rigidity, but they also recognized parts of the curriculum as complementing and extending their practices. There was a post-modern frame that disrupted their taking this as prescriptive practice. The manual was now considered a “writerly” curricular text (Sumara & Luce-Kapler, 1996).

*Richard: This book is not bad. The tone and wash exercises might be useful.*
Susan: I am seeing things in this leaf drawing I would not have seen. Maybe another year I would incorporate this into my teaching, but I wouldn't leave this at this “This is a leaf and how we draw all leaves.” (meeting 10)

I thought in undertaking this simulation they would recognize some of their own teaching practices and priorities as outdated and limited. They would understand the errors in their ways, but again I was confronted by my own shortcomings in understanding. Instead of taking the manuals on as complete programs to follow or dismissing them as obsolete, they found them useful as resources, requesting I copy several of the pages for their use. They would pick and choose from a drawing manual from the early 20th century as they would pick and choose from more child-centred approaches and/or any other program, pre-packaged curriculum, and/or manual. They would re-contextualize parts of these manuals with different priorities, just as they saw bits and pieces of what they were currently undertaking in their drawing units within the pages of the manuals.

Deirdre: I think that a lot of the things that are in here would be useful skills. My art methods course was free expression so we don’t know anything about trying to help them see things differently and increase their skills. I don’t see anything wrong with this except it is too codified.

Richard: I think the book has a lot to offer, because when I was flipping through - “Oh interesting I could use that.” I don’t mind having a book like that it is just the way that the book was used. If they had given me that book in lieu of my shitty art methods course it would have been better. (meeting 10)

Instead of learning to draw to insure a pool of workers for the manufacturing sector, learning to draw realistically for these teachers had other, yet related, purposes, such as confidence, concentration, personal style, and perceptual awareness. Furthermore, drawing had other endpoints (not just to develop skills in drawing realistically from memory), other ways in, and definitions. The purposes, priorities, and parameters of drawing were tied to units of study that were created by the teachers in relation to themes that overlapped other subject areas. Their teaching of drawing was more complex, responsive, and emergent than a pre-set outline of activities would allow for.

Deirdre: I enjoyed it. I liked the way the leaves turn over.

Nadine: So this simplifies nature in line like cartoons do to a certain extent….I think it is simpler to draw from two-dimensions rather than nature.
Deirdre: I think this is an intermediate step before nature. You learn from this and that you can take that with you while looking at the real thing. And when you look at the real thing you think — "Oh this is how I might do this."

Nadine: This was training manufacturers not artists.

Richard: It would be a nice combination. You could use this with real objects in tandem.

Deirdre: In actual fact. I liked some of the things in this book.

Nadine: Because you think students need skills?

Richard: I think students do want skills, like boundaries.

Deirdre: I agree.

Richard: I like the wash pages particularly.

Nadine: This book includes wash, pen, ink, pencil as drawing.

Susan: Famous artists who before they were able in their own world they had to get to step one first.

Nadine: But this stuff stopped with the Impressionists.

Susan: I just think that it is a leap of faith to a child in grade 6 going from getting on the bike to getting him to fly - instead of we are starting with tone then going into Impressionism [abstraction]. I think it is a leap of faith to jump into Impressionism [abstraction].

Nadine: And this book provides this?

Susan: I just get the sense that you have to have some sense of three-d.

Nadine: And that is what you have on the wall here. They have some confidence.
Susan: I would have to agree. I would feel much better them having confidence. Instead of materials and
imagination and drawing of feelings in an impressionistic way. (meeting 10)

The manual carefully delineates what is to be internalized on an unambiguous learning journey wherein
what to teach and how to learn are predetermined and straightforward. The teachers’ reactions to the
drawing manual reflected their turning away from considering the teaching of drawing as a single
curriculum that they were to follow, moving away from their learning as ruled by mimesis towards poiesis
and possibility (Trueit, 2005). They were teaching drawing in more emergent and dynamic ways that did
not assume a fixed, teleological end point as supposed in the drawing manual.

Richard: This is serviceable. “Turn to page 14.” You don’t have to collect materials. This was a time constraint
solution. It has nothing to do with teaching. (meeting 10)

If I had shown this earlier, at the start as some had hinted to wanting, I wonder how the reaction would
have been different.

Richard: I think it is a different experience to draw from a real object and a flat, copied image on a page.

Nadine: But boy if I mastered this could I walk away thinking I could confidently draw anything. Could I draw?

Richard: I don’t know. I don’t know what those kids could do if they saw a real object.

Nadine: That is your test?

Richard: I’d rather they draw from real objects from the start because it is a philosophical point, but I can see
why in those days they didn’t. (meeting 10)

Through their participation in this study group the teachers had entered into a space where they were
asked to not be mere passive recipients of pre-established meanings, but active interpreters and
practitioners who could generate alternative understandings and knowledge. We were not out to establish
or follow an ideal or idealized program. We were involved in a sustained conversation about practice,
values, and curriculum that permitted the disclosure and rejection of practices that were not inline with
our evolving conceptions of teaching drawing. As Clarke, Erickson, Collins, and Phelan (2005) have
shared “[t]he goal is not to discern a pre-given ideal form but to create that which is possible to sustain—a
‘good enough theory of curriculum’...(Davis et al., 1996, p.163)” that allows for improvisation (p. 171) and uncertainty. In entertaining the uncertainty of not following a pre-given curriculum, we were permitting ourselves to “live dangerously with pedagogy” (Clarke, Erickson, Collins, & Phelan, 2005, p. 172).

4.6.7 Morphed Expectations

Nadine: You were thinking you and Deirdre were compadres in the quest for observation and realism. But you did the morphing.

Susan: It was an accident. A good accident. (2nd interview)

Susan: I am thinking Deirdre and I are in this corner. And then Deirdre is telling me who her favourite abstract artist is!

Nadine: That is what I feel like about you. Just when I think I’ve got you guys pegged, you are doing this Frank Gehry, morphing stuff.

Susan: I didn’t do it the kid did.

Nadine: But you enabled it. You showed the video. (meeting 12)

Susan was building a new house and her interest in architecture manifested into an architectural drawing unit. She wanted students to eventually draw from homes in the neighbourhood. When asked if she would include some contemporary architecture in the area, she stated that she was not interested in any “modern architecture” and hoped to look at more historical examples of homes.

It is not clear to either of us where or when the term morphing came into Susan’s unit. She thought I brought it in; I think she was the first to use the term. After the class had drawn from birdhouses it was mid-October and Susan surprised me with a Halloween activity that involved students drawing from photocopied examples of haunted houses. These houses created shadows that whirled and distorted the images of the actual houses. In an email Susan wondered if they might “morph” easier or better than drawing “picture perfect versions” of the houses.
To: Nadine
From: Susan
Sent: November 7, 2006 5:41:06 PM
Subject: RE: homework feedback what was it like?? having Nadine in the classroom.

...For tomorrow here are my thoughts. Take a new stab at it; this time draw a line through half of the page. Left side draw a normal haunted house from the picture. Right side; draw a morphed house based on the drawing. I can compare; can they draw the house and can they morph. Maybe they can morph better than they can draw the house as in the picture perfect version (non-morphed)? Food for thought....

Susan (original punctuation)

To assist students in “morphing” the houses Susan asked students the following questions:

How do we morph? If I had just slanted and tilted is that all it takes to morph? We have to have slants and curving lines. What did you learn in grade 3 that involved slanting and curves? Handwriting. What other words could we use? Roundish, bent lines, wiggly, transform. Do we do transformations in math sometimes? (Susan teaching)

I was struck at how proficient the class was at drawing a “normal” house. Their observational drawing and practicing with the conventions of realism had provided them with enough know-how that they drew quickly and without hesitation. I had actually never experienced children en-masse drawing with such confidence. I shared with Susan that spending roughly five weeks drawing was paying off. But when it came to morphing, for the most part, they were stumped. They were struggling with changing a straightforward, realistic drawing into a morphed building. Susan too quickly recognized this and addressed the class.
Susan: We are having a conversation [as a class]. Sometimes things like in math take longer and then I have to adjust. I thought this would be fun. But we ran into roadblocks and frustrations. I thought it was clear because you had images in front of you. But this is a difficult concept and it may be the first time you have attempted this. So is it okay that we try this again?

Students: Yes.

Susan: We only get better if we practice. We can start fresh with a new outlook and attitude. We can make evaluations based on your efforts and we can evaluate your best work…. We are going to try to simplify the concept of morphing…. Your morphed side is abstraction to some point. Sometimes we re-visit. (Susan teaching)

Around this time Susan asked:

Susan: Do you know any artists that morph?

Nadine: Salvadore Dali. Melting almost. (Susan teaching)

This was a curious question for Susan since it was not her practice to bring artists into her art program. Over the study I had tried to connect artists’ works with the teachers’ projects and this seemed to fall flat. Perhaps the difference in this instance was that Susan asked me. I brought in an image of Dali’s Presence of Memory and the students connected this to a passage in their novel study of The Loser’s Club (LeKich, 2002). As students started to “morph,” their drawings reminded me of Frank Gehry’s architecture. I got on the internet and showed students how their drawings could relate to actual buildings. While Susan had
never heard of Frank Gehry, she could see the connections between what the students were doing and his work.

I liked that the kids could see internet sites to show them how architects do this in structures. What is that site address?? (original punctuation, from an email dated Nov. 28)

This sharing of images of Gehry’s buildings along with lending her a DVD of a documentary on Gehry (Thirteen/WNET, American Masters Productions, Mirage Enterprises, & Pollack, 2006), opened her up to how she might bring artists into her art program. Although she stated “I don’t do art history in art,” and she was very wary of turning her art class into an endless slide show, she would still “love to use the CD again” and “I think that is the first time I have ever shown a video in art. I think that was kind of cool because I don’t think they have had that in art.” She was beginning to realize that “there are ways of bringing in these images that we may never have thought of.”

This project had turned into a foray into a type of abstraction and an exploration of an artist/architect’s works that Susan had not anticipated or fully understood beforehand as the following interview excerpt elaborates:

Nadine: You didn’t know it would go as far as it did. You didn’t know that was more abstraction than you bargained for.

Susan: I realized it wasn’t stuck in the reality-based. And I think the Halloween thing allows for more freedom to do that. You can do stuff with Halloween that is different. Maybe it was license to do that. I was looking for something that was honestly quick and covered the Halloween thing.

Image 58: Morphed Haunted House, grade 6 student, pencil
Nadine: I remember it was only going to be a week.

Susan: They were almost crying at one point. And then they liked it.

Nadine: The Gehry stuff, when I went to the website?

Susan: That solidified it for some of them.

Nadine: There is more potential to any lesson than “Let’s just have some Halloween fun.” It is harder for you to key into this potential because you don’t have some of my knowledge.

Susan: I think it was neat — we did birdhouses and we did haunted houses and then there is this guy that morphs. I think that is the first time I have ever shown a video in art. I think that was kind of cool because I don’t think they have had that in art either.

Image 59: Morphed Taj Mahal, gr. 6 student, pencil crayon  
Image 60: Morphed Taj Mahal, gr. 6 student

Nadine: Was that the first time you did an artist?

Susan: I don’t do art history in art. (2nd interview)
Whether or not Susan is willing to “do art history” in the future, the Frank Gehry sojourn did leave an impact on her and her students.

To: The Drawing Group
From: Susan
Sent: November 28, 2006 7:38:13 PM
Subject: amazing moment in teaching art

Had an amazing moment today. But first a bit of history. Our class is working now on an architectural unit. We have had two attempts at two different types of buildings; step-by-step stuff based on something my husband gave me.

I had previewed the Frank Gehry video and thought I might use it one day.... Anyway, when 13 students were absent on Monday I decided to show the video because I did not want to teach any new curriculum and I had a test scheduled that had to be postponed. The video is quite long and I stopped it in a few places to point out some highlights. Some kids were quite fascinated....

Then today...while walking around during the postponed test I notice something on Sara’s desk. At first I thought I saw what was a misuse of paper...and then I looked more closely. Sara had sculpted a Frank Gehry-like building from strips of pink paper. I am not sure exactly when this took place but there it sat in its glory, quite curvy and in some cases folded like an accordion of sorts. With just strips of paper and some tape she had created this unique structure.

If I ever were to do this as an assignment I don’t know how I would ever assess it or make criteria for it. But it was a wonder to behold.

Sara was quite pleased that I recognized her sculpture as a Frank Gehry.

Susan

Susan recognized Sara’s piece as a response to the architecture and drawings from the Gehry DVD (Thirteen/WNET, et. al., 2006) and the architecture drawing the students had participated in, but could not see how she might incorporate this spontaneous creation, noting in her email “If I ever were to do this as an assignment I don’t know how I would ever assess it or make criteria for it.” But from our final interview, there is an indication that she might take another stab at it in future art projects.
Susan: I would sure love to use that Gehry CD again. Next year. (2nd interview)

4.6.8 Views on an Emerging Curriculum

Sent: September 28, 2006 4:58:48 PM  
To: Nadine  
From: Susan  
Subject: RE: How do I do this and that and when should you observe??/  
.... Where is this going? Well it's flowing...that's where it is going.....  
Susan

Over the fall, during which time the teachers took up developing their own units of drawing, Susan in particular noticed she was taking new paths that revealed themselves to her in the act of teaching instead of prior to teaching.

Susan: I have started and then veered off. You know you start with something and then it goes somewhere else. (meeting 8)

They were finding it easier to take risks and see where they could go.

Nadine: All three of you were doing things that were new. How has it felt to take risks, make mistakes, not knowing if it is going up on the wall?

Deirdre: Fine because it is the way I do a lot of things.

Richard: I enjoy it. I don't typically do the same thing every year anyway. It was a way to help me not get bored. (meeting 12)

Nadine: You mentioned discovery.

Susan: Discovery by trial in teaching. There are so many things I have discovered. It is a discovery process. Run with it take it one step further. That is risk taking. (1st interview)

Nadine: Is art still a mystery?
Susan: Yes, it is still a mystery because that is what art is. I do feel like I have a larger repertoire…. I view art curriculum as more evolving as opposed to following one “right way.” (2nd interview)

Richard described his wire sculpture unit undertaken by his student teacher that was inspired by his attendance at a Reggio Emilia conference in the spring. He was experimenting with materials and trying new things in his teaching. This spirit carried into his curriculum development over the fall.

Richard: I've looked back... For instance the wire sculpture unit — I didn't know the best way... we had an idea of incorporating the wire sculpture from Italy. Because I didn't have a book that told me the best way — “Here's how you start” — we kind of just experimented. And that gives you an idea that sort of worked out and we had no idea of what was going on. And when we came back for year two…. From the group I began to think in terms of my student teacher and our picking things up and trying things. He had never been to the conference; he just heard me talk about it.

Nadine: He just picked it up and tried it?

Richard: …and it was incredible. So that kind of made me think you know you don't have to worry things to death and write down every little detail. So when we met in the summer to talk about the Greg Tang (2003) book, I told you what I was thinking about. And you told me about the music and using the frame. And I thought, ‘You know these are good ideas, but it is not like one has to freak out about this you just have to relax a little.’ (2nd interview)

His need to find the one best way to do something had “relaxed” into the realization that there were a lot of valid starting and connecting points in art curriculum that might reveal themselves in the act of teaching.
CHAPTER 5 FRUSTRATED BY MY INTENTIONS

I do not care who you are, what you can do, or where you have studied if you have studied at all. I am concerned only with showing you some things which I believe will help you to draw. My interest in this subject is a practical one, for my efforts consist in trying to develop artists. (Nicolaides, 1941, p. 1)

Every mode of knowing is also a mode of being in relationship. It is a relationship of mutual care and love, often distorted into mere attentiveness and sometimes distorted into control and oppression. When vulnerable one must either recognize and accept the other and the necessity of care or love, or one must seek control of the other, who is both threat and possibility. (Huebner 1985, pp. 170-171)

Nadine: I will work with your willingness. I am going to show my hand, my insecurities, and limitations with drawing. (meeting 1)

My assumptions about research, teaching, and art making have been molded by my experiences that interweave tacit, personal, social, and cultural knowledge. I bring this baggage to light in my interpretations and interactions throughout the study. Therefore my journey and experiential trajectory within this group is a unique embodiment of what has come before and what is under construction.

5.1 Orderly Default

[There is sense that linearity is synonymous with order. (Stanley, 2005, p. 144)]

During the first half of the study I was concerned that I was not effectively controlling the group. We talked longer around certain topics than I thought we might, conversations went off on tangents, and we never had time to cover all of the items on my prepared to-do lists. At the same time, I feared the frustration I felt as a result of this lack of control and clear direction was coming through in my voice during meetings. While listening to the digital recordings of our meetings, the interaction of voices was not as I had remembered. My voice was present, but I was predominantly questioning the others, revealing my limitations, and trying to understand. My lack of control was permitting openings that I was not aware of in the moment of experiencing the meeting.
During one part of a recording I was explaining how to use pastels and describing the different types. I was imparting my knowledge. I focused in on this because my voice was so present, but within these few minutes of conversation I was coloured by their responses and they each took in what I was saying in different ways as represented, in part, by their reactions. I was compelled to use coloured dry pastels to image what I was hearing. I chose particular colours to represent each participant and I laid out the voices as coloured marks along a line that indicated the time of the utterances. The way the voices related, echoed, overlapped, extended, overpowered, and ignored each other lent itself to the blending and layering of pastel marks.

I had replaced my negative and paralyzing voices with the sounds of the group. Sound was imported into my drawing and the recording was understood in a new way through my marks. The context and the subject interrupted the coherence with which I experienced the world as a drawer. I was not drawing from observation. There was no visual referent. Curiously the only schema to represent this soundtrack that I could envision was a chart. My default was a linear framing of a complex world.

While my judgmental voices were anaesthetized in the moment of attending to the other voices and their evolving meanings, my charting was not neutral. It was a way to control, to bring order, to measure, to get an "accurate" account. I was assuming a taken-for-granted order not only in the way I translated what I heard into what I saw, but in learning, teaching, researching, and drawing. My role in the research, which was to take the teachers to a pre-determined end and my drawings, was what I considered literal translations of an observed reality. Given enough time, everyone in the group would see inline with my view. This drawing in particular revealed my deeply inscribed habit of
engaging, understanding, and describing experience. Description was a way to separate, divide, and conquer. The collaborative works known as "The Argument Drawings" by Janet Cohen, Keith Frank, and Jon Ippolito (Koplos, 1997) have concerned diagramming their discussions on large sheets of paper. Coloured lines represent each voice and these are arranged on a grid corresponding with the number of times a person speaks and links to a topic, which is written beneath each diagram. This process and product reflect the futility of attempting to control and re-represent the complex and indefinite. The irony of my desire to control the ineffable was coming into view.

Both the process of creating this drawing and my being in relation with the other group members helped surface my framing, my instincts to control, and how my paradigm limited what I could imagine and make sense of. Formal, rational thought still confined my language, my actions, my interpretations, and my creating. The precision and lucidity that charts and realism purport to communicate was illusory and as my crisis in drawing had made me realize years before, lacking in lived meaning. It was my drawing anxieties that led me away from a desire to control. Was I ready to surrender to what was before me?

5.2 De-centralizing Control

In the group we all were there “to learn as well as teach, to listen as well as speak” (Luce-Kapler, 1997, p. 327) in order to create a community where we could examine our practices and envision choices we might pursue. There was interdependence to our inquiry, which co-emerged and co-evolved. We were all researchers, facilitators, and participants in this co-created context and process. As a critical friend I was facilitating each teacher’s autonomy in constructing knowledge related to his or her practices (Stenhouse, 1975) while I was also problematizing this construction. But this role was undertaken by the other teacher/researchers and, accordingly, it followed that my mindset was continually tested as well. In this milieu we were opened to learning from our mutual and individual resistances and tensions. This challenged me to be open to learning from the unknown and the Other – that is, what people bring to learning and how they take up change in their own contexts and lives.

Luce-Kapler (1997) articulates her realization that her action research group participants “did not need someone to offer them choices and guide them in new directions. They needed an opportunity, a time and a place, where they could work with the choices they were already making” (p. 322). What I found was that the teacher/researchers did want specific types of guidance and information, but that they set the terms and parameters of this assistance. In this they led me. Moreover, the issues of concern for them,
such as the conventions of pictorial realism, were not the issues and content that I valued or thought of as worthy of investigation, at least initially.

Over the course of the project, my authority became more self-undermining, especially with the erosion of my initial expectations. The research process was awakening me to the partial, biased, and incomplete qualities of my knowing. I was confronted by the constraints of my own investments, desires, authority, status, and commitments. In this came the realization that my desired outcomes had been in part blinding me to experiencing the learning journey. I had to empty myself in order to be open to the contingency that was before me (Phelan, 1998) while also enter into a dialogue with the ideological framings that buttressed my authority and were thrown into conflict. I was in-between by bringing into contact disparate ways of viewing teaching, learning, and drawing.

\textit{Nadine: My preconceptions, my learning from and learning through. I am learning through being a teacher and I am learning about/with/through you guys and about drawing. And what defines research…. And it has been uncomfortable for me. I may have eight things I want to cover but I may get to two. So it is not as easy as my role as teacher. Sometimes I don't feel I am in charge as much as I might want to be. Other times I want to slap myself. You listen to the tapes and I can feel the frustration in my voice.}

\textit{Deirdre: We don't notice.}

\textit{Nadine: As a researcher you are supposed to…}

\textit{Deirdre: Stand back?}

\textit{Nadine: I am being questioned and I am on the line. As opposed to standing back and remaining in control. (1st interview)}

\section*{5.3 Confronting Identities}

I could write about action research, I could theorize what it would be like, but in conducting a study using action research I was confronted with my limited appreciation of this type of research in action. My previous research studies had explored participants’ changes and experiences (for example, Kalin, 2002, 2005), while I remained silent, neglecting my motivations, the basis of my interpretations, and rarely
confronting my own background and history. I reported on data as if it were static and unfiltered by my interpretive lens.

This research project required me to delve into and expose myself as research, teacher, and artist in relation to the group as well as my own history. My ongoing narratives emerged on the digital page, in conversation, and through my own drawing. The wrestling with previous and current influences and barriers was tracked in an effort to reveal my evolving stance towards this project, the participants, data interpretation, re-presentation of the research, the field of art education, and issues of teaching drawing.

Also while undertaking this study I was confronted by my identities as teacher and researcher. I had understood these identities as very separate, one removed and objective, the other more involved and directive. Both of these identities underwent a shift. They not only integrated, but in this coming together, they both have been reconfigured.

As an action researcher, I fell into the familiar identity of teacher whereby I would rather unconsciously set and maintain a goal while working with students. This was something I had been strongly encouraged to abandon by my committee, but it was easier advised than adhered to while I was in the midst of the study, at least at the beginning. There was at some level a secret assumption that given the opportunity, everyone in the group would come to value drawing in essentially the same way that I did. Phrased in this way, it sounds naïve and yet it may be an assumption shared by many people who choose to teach and research into education. This is what many try to do when they teach, get students to think in the ways they do. I could not uncouple teaching from researching within action research. It was a safety net that made my identity as researcher more comfortable. While I was used to being somewhat objective in the collection of data, I did not have experience with groups of teacher-researchers over time. I did however have experience teaching teachers. Through action research, I was expected to be more involved with the participants and reflective upon our learning, practices that called me as a teacher in a particular way.

While listening to others’ points of view and learning related to drawing, I was often times frustrated by the slow pace, recursion, resistance, and even the particular self-directed paths of change adopted by the participants. Although I was a researcher, I was among a group of researchers. Although I was considered the expert, I was requiring the teachers to lead their own projects. We all knew that change would happen in this group, but my teacher identity found it difficult to let it just unfold.
I did not trust that the teachers would learn through the processes of conversation, reflection, and practice in ways that were valuable to me. In retrospect, this is hard to admit to myself. The phrase "ways that were valuable to me" exposes my limited view of what I interpreted as "ways that the field of art education would value." The teachers' ways and values were not considered within this goal except as deficit.

I could not imagine any other endpoints nor could I imagine the process without pre-set objectives. But I did not realize this until the teachers did not conform to what I implicitly assumed. The contexts and processes I was enabling through action research were allowing their goals, values, and ways to surface and alter all of our understandings of the potentialities of art education related to drawing. And it was within these tensions that I began my own ongoing processes of transformation. So much of what I believed as a teacher was wrapped up in my abilities to get students from point A to a pre-determined point B. This belief was thrown into flux, especially when teacher/researchers did not take up the topics in drawing I had somewhat unconsciously hoped they would.

### 5.4 Emerging Spaces

Education understood as providing people with specific experiences so that they meet prespecified ends and become particular kinds of people (such as people who can teach drawing in a certain way), moving students intellectually from point A to point B, is a form of "planned enculturation" (Osberg, 2005, p. 81). This is based on the notions of determinism and linear progression. People are educated in a particular way that is decided in advance by the dominant culture. One cannot escape the idea that education involves "purposely shaping human subjectivity" (Osberg, 2005, p. 82), but we can do this without assuming we know (once and for all) what a person should become at the onset.

Educators must try to understand that the only knowledge which they have—about who they are dealing with, and the goal of their teaching—is a product of the emerging situation itself. This knowledge, in other words, is contingent, not static. We therefore participate in the shaping of subjectivity not from a fixed, pre-determined position, but from a position of extreme flexibility and responsiveness to the moment or space we are in. We educate in what might be called a 'space of emergence.' This 'space of emergence' is a space of radical contingency and response. In it we do not know, for sure, who we are or who we are dealing with because it is only through our responses in this space that we become who we are....Because it is a space of radical contingency this also means whoever emerges in this space emerges as a completely unique and singular
being. From this perspective, if we try to shape human subjectivity in a predetermined way, we obstruct the emergence of human subjectivity. (italics from original, Osberg, 2005, p. 82)

Within this emergence educators are still involved in the non-arbitrary shaping of human subjectivity, but the nature of this shaping is emergent, not predetermined. Instead of endeavoring to socialize people towards conforming to the same desired end and way of being, education is more a practice which always complicates the scene, unsettles the doings and understandings of others, in order to keep open a space of difference and otherness—a space of radical contingency—which is supportive of the emergence of each and every person as a unique and irreplaceable being. (Osberg, 2005, pp. 82-83)

It follows then that educational practices within emergence are concerned with the surfacing of meaning rather than the transfer of meaning that has been predetermined. An educator must be cognizant of how a given pedagogy functions to reproduce his or her way of understanding a particular concept. An emergentist pedagogy does not aim to reproduce or replicate the knowledge of the educator. In an effort to bring forth meaning, we are asking those involved in education to “come into presence” (Osberg & Biesta, 2004, p. 222) for as we make meaning we take a position. This making of meaning, understood as the emergence of new ideas instead of the reproduction of knowledge, occurs through exposure to the unfamiliar and the questioning of habitual ways of doing. “We are therefore constituted or called into presence through our meaning making with others, with the Other, or the otherness of the other: with what is different to us” (italics from original, Osberg & Biesta, 2004, p. 223). Through teaching with difference, disruption, and challenge in relation to others we are provided with interactions that can enable the re-negotiation of current understandings as well as the appearance of new meanings while permitting the emergence of human subjectivity (Arendt, 1958).

Acknowledging the circumstances wherein we find it difficult to achieve what is desired, where we are frustrated by our intentions, must be appreciated as the conditions, which make education possible (Biesta, 2001). Just as it is the responsibility of educators to unsettle understandings within a “space of emergence,” it also behooves them to be open to the obstacles that provoke their own discomfort and how difficulties can reveal researchers/educators’ intentions toward reaching predetermined ends. In this discomfort, we are asked to examine and unsettle our objectives.

In this space of emergence, where people are asked to take a position and reveal themselves becoming, they are placing themselves at risk. The consequence of their taking a stand is not known at the moment,
we only know that something will come about in relation to the emergence of a being. Unplanned change is rarely easy.

5.5 Overbearing Uncertainty

At the end of our sixth group meeting prior to the summer break two of our members claimed to be “Nadine disciples.” One even joked that they should carve the letter “N” into their foreheads. While this was no doubt meant to flatter me, it was alarming. I had not envisioned the “fusions of horizons” this way, nor was my goal to create feelings of subservience in the participants. If they were my disciples, they were not changing in the ways I secretly had hoped for. Nonetheless, something was happening to these teachers and to me.

It was around this point in the study that I reread a copy of *Chaos, Complexity, Curriculum, and Culture* (Doll, Fleener, Trueit, & St. Julien, 2005). I was in a state of uncertainty and desperation. I was so unsure of my role and what we were up to as a group. Were we doing anything but talking about old dichotomies and practices? Was I too overbearing? Were we involved in a hermeneutics of reproduction?

I read the volume cover to cover and did little else over a two-day period. Through my reading, I was brought to an awareness of the potentialities of our discussions, and the importance of an emergent curriculum within the group. These concurrent strands helped me to rest in the messiness of action research (Cook, 1998; Mellor, 2001), ask different questions, experiment with altered conceptions of my identities during the final half of the research, and engage with my own drawing in a radically unfamiliar manner. I started to read further and began to rely also on the previous work of Doll (1993) as well as the writings of Davis, Sumara, and Luce-Kapler (2000) in my unlearning and continual becoming.

5.6 Evolving Change

Within the discrepancies between my priorities and the teachers’ points of view, I began to re-conceive of change in less narrow terms. It was not so much about funneling teachers down one correct path, but more about a learning process that was triggered and not caused (Reynolds, 2005). I had to be aware of my biases and assumptions about teacher change in art and open these views up to the evolving and complex processes before me. I realized my identities as researcher/facilitator in this action research study were entangled with the identity of teacher and that my underlying beliefs about teaching were themselves beginning to shift. I realized that I had been teaching inline with a common myth in education – that as
teachers we are in control of individual change. I began to understand that I am not able to change others. Only individuals can change through an ownership of and commitment to their own learning. For change to occur I cannot force it. I have to facilitate and support whatever forms of change are adopted. This translates into me giving up control over the processes and results.

Here two concerns were brought to the surface: 1) I was made aware of my goals in relation to their differing agendas, while 2) I had to abandon and simultaneously examine my own unspoken goals for the group. I was entering a pedagogic space where neither the endpoints nor starting points could be known at the outset. Instead of enabling my goals, I was helping the teachers develop their own pedagogic relationships with drawing. So this realization of my own priorities and how these teachers did not measure up precipitated a crucial period of questioning my objectives for a post-modern drawing curriculum, my identity within the group, my conceptions of teaching with others, and my understanding of action research.

I had not envisioned this group focusing on realism in drawing for the first half of the study. Although a doctoral research committee member warned, "I bet they will just want practical, how-to assistance," I all but ignored that comment. I thought that this might be touched on during the initial meetings and that this would rapidly give way to perhaps more contemporary drawing practices and discourses. But the teachers/researchers were setting the pace and the topics of inquiry. Conversely, as Sachs (2000) maintains,

If the research questions are posed by outsiders, such as academic researchers, then the research findings often have little effect on the classroom practices of teachers and the learning outcomes of students in schools. Collaborative research between teachers and academics, where the research questions are posed collaboratively, can have a significant impact on classroom practice. (p. 91)

They wanted to deal with the conventions of pictorial realism in drawing. Looking back, this seemed fundamental to their changing of perspectives. Additionally, it was through an openness to their experience and perspectives that I came to better know my own shortcomings and motivations.

To take up post-modernism as I valued it, through a drawing curriculum that embraced drawing as meaning-making within visual culture and an issues-based view of art, was not the only way to counter a cycle of reproduction or reflect a post-modern objective. To transcend their traditions according to my priorities would amount to ascribing to a new meta-framework that might be viewed as irrelevant to their experiences and their creative dialogue with alternatives. I came to concede that to require these teachers
to converge toward my narrow ends would amount to them ascribing to a meta-framework that might be irrelevant to their experiences and prevent the possibilities for creative dialogue with alternatives. I also revisited the basis of my so-called “post-modern objectives” and what it meant to create curriculum within a post-modern frame.

I was moved from a naïve desire to change the teachers to an understanding that through their resistances and choices they were enacting change for themselves that was both complex and post-modern in its processes. Instead of imposing change, I was working with them to explore and search for paths of transformation that they desired and steered. In this, the teacher/researchers disrupted my agenda and my view of post-modernism.

While I will leave the reader to conclude whether or not the specific processes and curricular programs of the research group effectively reflect a post-modern spirit, it bears stating some of the ways that teachers crafted curricular experiences that I now view as falling within an enlarged and evolving post-modern framework. The teacher-researchers within this study explored issues, blended a variety of artistic traditions, and incorporated popular culture within their drawing units. Susan shared drawing projects that focused on world issues such as global warming and human rights (see image 27). She infused the conventions of pictorial realism with social messages through the depiction of scenes of refugees, sweatshops, natural disasters, and other “scars on the earth.” She aimed to get students to use their drawing skills to impart a message and develop sensitivity to these images. Richard was infusing the formal explorations of modernist abstraction with individual student narratives, using this familiar aesthetic canon as a starting point for the articulation of stories. He was blurring the traditional boundaries between media by using wire and paint to draw. He took up collaborative drawing/creating practices within his art program. Deirdre’s cat colouring project was based on practices outside of the high art canon. And I explored how drawing could be taken up as a form of meaning making in relation to my past and my evolving present.

I did not explicitly share my goal with the group until our first individual meetings at the end of the summer (half-way through the study), when they had already started on their own paths and my goal was in the process of being abandoned and greatly re-configured. I kept my vision at bay. I struggled with it and was frustrated by it. The reliance on my teacherly ways challenged my understanding of action research and teaching. The reliance on my own values to gauge the change that was underway challenged my understanding of art education. The dissonance between what I thought was possible and what was actually happening was distressing, but it also became the focus of my self-examination within this study.
Moreover, I became more interested in listening to the teachers as they began “to imagine curriculum differently” (Hollingsworth, Dybdahl, & Turner Minarik, 1993, p. 13) and learning about the nature of our relational learning.

5.7 Mindfully Negotiating

I had not been able to predict how the interaction of the individuals in the group might impact our research. In my previous studies, while I worked with a number of participants, for the most part they remained isolated. I have had to take a more holistic view of learning and research. Davis and Sumara (2005) describe the “interactivity of the action research collective” as conversing (p. 462). In this collective context they consider the role of the researcher “as analogous to the role of consciousness in an individual” in that “consciousness does not direct, but it does orientate” (p. 462). Therefore, “conducting action research is about minding – being mindful in, being conscious of, being the consciousness of – the collective” (italics from the original, p. 462).

**Nadine:** I have been struggling with my role. I’ve been thinking of my role differently. I wanted to know how you as a participant were feeling. This type of research is quite unnerving to some people because I am not the only expert in the room. You are all experts in your own contexts and journeys – you’ve come up with ways to work for you. Just as you are questioning and open to continuing to learn so am I. I have learned a lot from you guys. My voice is very present. I have been questioning my role. I wanted to know if you thought you were bringing more than just yourself. You don’t necessarily think of yourself as part of the teaching team.

**Richard:** No, I never really thought of that. I thought of myself as the student and learning from the conversation. I am aware there are four of us in the room. But I think of you as someone who fills the room with rich objects and then you manipulate what happens with them. Hidden agenda or something. I don’t think of this in a negative way. You bring a big box and you share them with us and you blow me away. I feel as though I am going further on this journey called art because of that. When we talk I cannot imagine us having those conversations without you being there. You keep us on track and steer us like this down a pathway. I have the idea that you know this thought over here and you are kind of driving us over here. You bring the conversation in this direction. You talk about certain topics and you want to relate this topic to the objects we brought from our class. And these are new topics and new objects. I think it is quite rich because of what you are doing. I love it. You may be questioning what you are doing and what your role is.

**Nadine:** You don’t feel you are giving as much as you are getting?
Richard: I don’t think I am meeting you halfway because I do not have the knowledge you have.

Nadine: Every meeting I have an agenda with eight items and I may get two done. I have this problem with my role and “Am I supposed to be in control?” or “Where is this going to take us so that I can learn something that I wasn’t predicting?” And your voices have to take over my plan. If I am doing 90% of it, I have overshot my planning. You are bringing a lot to the table.

Richard: I never cautiously thought about me teaching the group and meeting you halfway because my knowledge is miniscule compared to your knowledge. But what I think happens in meetings...you have this list of points to cover. It is like a forest fire and the wind blows it in different direction. Your bullets or thoughts are the forest fire and then the three of us are like wind and temperature and storms out here. Someone might say something and that becomes the direction we go in because the energy flows in that direction. I don’t think someone consciously comes in and thinks I am teaching the next 9 min. of this conversation. Something happens when you bring up these points. I think the conversation starts. The painting we brought in we are looking at and analyzing or a page from a book you have given us. Maybe it brings up past memories of our classrooms or experiences. We wouldn’t have brought those up without you.

Nadine: And you bringing those up help me reconfigure how I viewed those points going in. I might think it is going to be straightforward – “I am going to give them this info and we will have a 2 minute conversation” – but it is never that straightforward. And this is where I stand back and where I learn. And if I am learning, we all have the potential to learn. It is a different definition of teaching and a different definition for me as researcher. An idea of pedagogy that is more a conversation than me imparting knowledge.

Richard: I feel you are guiding this conversation like a fire. And I think these are wonderful conversations. I think they happen because you facilitate them. I don’t think they would happen if you were not there. (L interview)

“Understanding research in this way means that there are no all encompassing answers sought, but rather patterns of living that can be revealed, helping individuals better understand how to be in the world” (Luce-Kapler, Sumara, & Davis, 2002, p. 369). In this my role was an interpreter “of others’ values” (Doll, 1993, p. 168) in a community where not one of us owned the truth, and where each of us had the right to be heard. Doll (1993) warns

[t]here is risk involved in this process view – as there is all transformation – for it means we are willing to base our future on a present grounded on nothing but itself, its historical past, and our querulous faith in ourselves…. This is an art born not of faith in the
rightness of our ideologies but of our ability to be playful with serious commitments. Such a paradoxical blending becomes key. (p. 156)

Nadine: Does it bother you that I am not certain about the exact way to teach drawing, that I am still a work in progress?

Richard: No, I kind of like it. Maybe at a certain point in my career it would have bothered me when I was from that school of thought. “Recipe one is how you do math; recipe two how you do reading.” Because I have taught a lot of years it doesn’t seem strange that you are questioning how one should teach art. I think that is good. Because I think the longer you teach the more you realize that if you have 25 kids in the class and you teach reading in only one way you may service some of those kids but the others will never learn how to read. So I don’t think there is one way. Now, not being an art specialist I am assuming it works the same way in art. I am hoping it does. That is what I am basing it on because students come with their own strengths and weaknesses and I don’t know whether any one style of teaching in PE or art would get the message through to all of those kids. So I am not shocked, annoyed, upset that you don’t know how to teach art in one way. (1st interview)

“[I]nstead of laying out the truth” (Doll, 1993, p. 151) as a teacher/researcher I was assisting the other participants and myself “‘negotiate passages’ between ourselves and others, between ourselves and our texts” (Doll, 1993, p. 156). As Doll (1993) further articulates,

The intent is not to prove (even to oneself) the correctness of a position but to find ways to connect varying viewpoints, to expand one’s horizon through active engagement with another. This engagement is a process activity, which transforms both parties, be they text and reader or student and teacher. My own curriculum utopia would be to see this interactive, interpretative, iterative process proliferate endlessly. (p. 151)

I became less interested in focusing on where I thought they might go and more attuned to understanding how their teaching and learning of drawing reflected in-process personal, relational, intuitive, historical, and empirical stances.

5.8 Reciprocating

Susan: You have given me some great ideas. I think this is the thing. Not that you are a replacement for my husband [her usual source of art ideas]. You have challenged me and said, “Here is something to think about.” I believe it was you who said, “You might want to think about drawing those bird houses.” If you didn’t, there were other things that you said like that.

Nadine: As facilitator, as co-learner.
Susan: Yeah. Sometimes you would verbalize.

Nadine: I think that was key.

Susan: Even sometimes you would say, “I am learning from you guys.” We are different people. You have your purple lenses. (2nd interview)

Committing to such an approach was not a comfortable endeavor for me at the outset. As well intentioned as I might be, I was plagued by thoughts that questioned my competency as a researcher, my ability to control a research group, and dictate our learning. At the same time I was wary of these questions and wondered why I desired to feel in control and committed to my hidden agenda. The power of my previous research and teaching experiences over my thinking was palpable and unnerving. I was acting one way, and thinking in another. It was in the doing, the thinking, and the sharing with others that I was able to bring to the surface my fundamental assumptions for public scrutiny.

While I had hopes for the directions we might pursue as a group, I was not prepared to ask the teacher-participants to blindly accept my vision. I hoped that they would ignore my authority and set out on their own paths of inquiry. I would in turn assist them on their paths. I did not share my wishes for their change until they were involved in their own objectives and I was well on my way toward viewing my previous visions as ill conceived.

Within school-based teacher inquiry there is an expectation of reciprocity between teachers and the academics that form collaborative partnerships whereby they each assume the other will contribute to their professional understanding. There is the anticipation that there will be an exchange of each other’s expertise and skills (Yeatman, 1996). Within these partnerships both parties believe they need the other in order to progress.

To: Nadine
From: Susan
Sent: November 7, 2006 5:41:06 PM
Subject: RE: homework feedback what was it like?? having Nadine in the classroom.
...I liked that you came to us...our classrooms are our worlds and our domains. I liked having an expert who was in the know without be a know it all....
Susan

While I think it was important for me to model my own critical reflection for the group – I did not have all the answers and I was a co-learner in regards to drawing – as the researcher who initiated this project and the doctoral student who was required to document the processes, I came prepared to share any of my
knowledge and resources as the participants desired. For their part, they frequently asked for the support they felt they needed. I provided feedback on teaching, collaborated on the creation of units, answered technical questions, showed them how to work with certain materials, co-taught with them, and lent out resources related to their interests. On my part, my own knowledge, presumptions, and theories were debated and challenged through this process. As Sachs (2000) states, academics that enter into research with practitioners must hold up their expertise and research practices to the same scrutiny that teachers' beliefs and actions are placed under. Academics' knowledge should be “interrogated and made mutually visible” (Sachs, 2000, p. 84). By examining my complicity in the practices I was critiquing (Sumara & Luce-Kapler, 1996) my own reflection was spurred on. Moreover, this shared transparency and responsibility is conducive to a context of active trust within the collaborative research. As Susan articulated in our last interview, “We all got our needs met.”

5.9 Questioning and Listening

There was a sort of balance that I had to strike though. While I was aware that the teacher-participants wanted help with content and practice related to drawing, I was also finding myself holding back at times and questioning the teachers instead of automatically giving them my knowledge. Similar to Levinas (1981, 1988, 1998), I tried to act as less the provider of answers and more the questioner who learns with, about, and from Others. My questions could not be pre-planned, nor were the responses anticipated. I was not attempting to have my questioning reach a preset conclusion in the participating teachers, but I was questioning in order to hear and better understand what they were experiencing. It was more dialogical in character for in questioning and listening to Others I often found my own relationship to knowledge disrupted and its limitations reflected back to me. It was an avenue that brought forth an awareness of my own attending and the motivations and basis of the foundations of my questioning. At times, my questioning and listening to Others facilitated my own unlearning of what I thought I knew, especially when answers did not meet my predictions.

The pedagogy was unstable, the path was uncertain; risk was always present in my teaching with difference. This surrendering to uncertainty was not always easy and I did fall back on familiar patterns in the face of the unknown, at several occasions assuming I alone knew the right way, believing I could fully understand the Other, and that my purpose was to get the teachers to know what I already thought I knew. At times, the traces of my questions, of my teaching, could be discerned in the teachers’ interactions with each other, in the shifts of our conceptions of teaching, and in their practices of teaching. There had to be spaces and patience on my part in waiting for them to genuinely and repeatedly respond over time. I had
to balance and attempt to not intentionally shut down or control the emergence of meaning and the possibilities of subjectivity so as to not replicate my own understanding or reproduce a set of meanings that I might consider “best”. My actions were co-emerging with and in responsive attunement to the Others’ actions and sense making (Davis, Sumara, & Luce-Kapler, 2000, p. 144).

5.10 Drawing with a Conversation

Much as I love writing, it is drawing that demonstrates to me just how much can be said with a single apparently careless mark. Letters in written words are like rows of little straightjackets in comparison with the abundant feeling of meaning in that mark.

(Elkins & Berger, 2005, pp. 106-107)

The results of art education will be both to put a tongue to our fingers by which we may express form, and cause a recoil on our minds which must generate thought and inquiry.

(Walter Smith quoted in Chalmers, 2000, p. 34)

While engaging in collage and charting an excerpt of conversation were attempts to set me free from straight line thinking, from a linear representation of experience, the end results were too conceptual and literal. There were few openings. The charting of the conversation eroded the re-presentation of my involvement to a controller of a centralized structure instead of a subjective and emerging engagement. I searched for another way to get at the web of relationships, voices, and meanings that my charting and collaging restrained and visually oppressed. I needed a different way of mapping these energies without shutting down evolving possibilities.

I decided to listen to the digital recording of our conversations and push my limits of imaging. I let the voices lead my dry pastels as I surrendered to the energy of the conversation, an energy not under my sole orchestration. This forced me to remain open while reaching towards a non-linear response. Could I elicit an evolving image from a conversation? Leaving the structure of a chart behind, there were no preconceived images or visual referents, just voices that I responded to.

In the collage, words were my materials. Here sound passed through me to the dry pastels. I was visualizing my perception in the moment of re-presentation. I took it in, reformed it, while in the act of interpreting. I was entangled and complicit in the web that was emerging on the page. This non-representational image tracked my exploration of the mutable nature of conversation, interpretation, and understanding.
In this act I was again out to make the familiar strange, but this time I worked on perceiving form in a different way. I was aware of how verbal language could colour my visual interpretations, perceptions, and images. The aural and the visual were informed by, related to, and interchangeable with the other. I was experimenting with integrating my eyes with my ears and relying on a different sense. This discrepancy between the spoken word and the visual and or textual equivalent is explored in the work of Stefana McClure’s drawings of “films into paper” (Jana, 2006, p. 24). McClure translates the experience
of listening to and watching a film while reading the subtitles into marks and lines at the bottom of square compositions that echo and abstract the rhythms of subtitles and spoken language.

I was subverting linear logic and the conventions of pictorial realism. The notion of accuracy in representation fluctuated. What form might approximate an "accurate" representation of a conversation? Richard (2001) maintains that visualizing conversation "is a constructed fantasy, a quixotic and intentional mix-up between quantitative and qualitative analysis" (n. p.). In juxtaposing the material with the ineffable I was involved in a signifying practice, whereby in re-presenting I am at once solidifying something while dematerializing another (Richard, 2001). Just as Beuys claimed that speaking could be a form of sculpture, I was "sculpting sounds" gesturing in the air and on the two dimensional surface (Berger & Berger, 2005, p. 134).

Our voices and my marks were created in an ecology of relations (Davis, Sumara, & Luce-Kapler, 2000). Berger speaks to this in his description of how a drawing begins:

The second line altered the nature of the first. Whereas before the first line had been aimless, now its meaning was fixed and made certain by the second line. Together they held down the edges of the area between them, and the area, straining under the force, which had once given the whole page the potentiality of depth, heaved itself up into a suggestion of solid form. The drawing had begun. (Berger, 2005/1960, pp. 5-6)

We were not separate as we agreed and echoed each other. We blended and then came apart, recognizing our differences and similarities while continually coming into being. The voices were not isolated, they were embedded and contingent. In conversation a speaker is never wholly on his or her own for a person's acts are partly "shaped" by the acts of the others around them – and this is where all the strangeness of the dialogical begins. For, in the intricate 'orchestration' of the chiasmic intertwining occurring between our own outgoing, responsive \textit{expressions} toward those others (or othernesses) and their equally responsive incoming \textit{expressions} toward us, both a special phenomenon and a special kind of understanding of it occurs. (italics from original, Shotter, 2005, p. 203)

As I listened I became aware of patterns, silences, and expressions. I noted the short utterances, the "ums" and "uh huhs," that indicated a speaker was in agreement or in contemplation. I also considered the unspoken thoughts that were absent in the recording.
I followed and re-presented threads in the conversation that would root and link to other threads. Certain topics within a conversation are subject to entropy while others evolve. The conversation is inherently unstable, but structured. I needed to image this in a way that might suggest, instead of totally condense, disorder and imbalance. The emerging image was nebulous and reminiscent of images from the night sky such as universes, pulsars, constellations, and black holes. The image also had a correspondence to the cluster drawings of Mark Lombardi that present diagramed narratives within abstract webs. Voices gathered around topics, but remained separate, never finally coming together. The image, like the conversation, was attempting to resist reduction.

The drawing diagrammed how the conversation spoke in multiple directions. Just as voicing within a conversation is the recapitulation of thought, my drawing reiterated the organic nature of coming to understanding. I picked and chose what topics to focus on and what patterns to represent. Ideas formed hubs around which voices and meanings were extended. It approached the rhizomatic swirl of ideas that recursively came in and out of focus, on the edge between order and disorder.

In my drawing, I was destabilizing the notion of identical experience in looking and talking. The conversation was re-created every time I listened and re-listened. Just as everyone in the group would take away something else from our verbal collaborations, with each listening I would pick up something I had not heard the previous time.

Control is unpredictable and elusive in conversation as it was in my imaging of such a realm. The effect of the drawing as a still-forming artifact of the interlocked and complex dynamics of others in conversation symbolizes my emerging sensibilities in the research project. I was not in control of this drawing or the conversation. I could not fully understand or contain our processes. I was not the objective observer of the other teacher-researchers. On the contrary, in opening to the indeterminate, the unexpected, and the emergent, the teacher, researcher, and artist must respond to situations in a much more creative way. I was intertwined in and responding to the indeterminate nature of our network of relations. The conversation led me, but I was a filter.

I wondered if the image was fluent with the voices and spaces I was trying to illustrate. Like the re-presentation of our experience within the research group, ambitions toward "truthful" documentation of this conversation were in vain. I was removed from the conversation. I could not speak back or participate within the actual time of the conversation that had by then passed. But I was not detached. I was in proximity and still in a type of conversation with it. I was responding in a different, non-verbal way that
changed my understanding of the conversation and the nature of re-presentation. Unlike replaying the file for transcription purposes, I was listening for other things – patterns, stops and starts, echoes, and reverberations – as a way to recuperate the presence of others being in relation in the moment.

Distortion was inherent in the process of tracing and interpreting the original matrix of connections, reverberations, and layering of meaning making. I had to pick and choose what to emphasize and in this I was only partly conscious. In areas my pencil hovered, circling in the air before diving in. In such an interactive framework, knowledge becomes an active construction of transforming and transformative reality composed of interwoven patterns rather than an objective representation of stable reality.

As Richard (2001) articulates, imaging “conversation differs from writing because it literally indexes language as shape. It arranges words across an armature of space” (n.p.). While my image was abstract, I found myself attempting to evoke dimension in the image, a depth in space, which paralleled the passing of time. In conversation “[t]he modulations of tone, timing, and implication form an uneven surface, a topology of group exchange” (Richard, 2001, n.p.). Colours receded and came forward in response to topics and ideas/forms evolving. Again an excerpt from Berger articulates this process: “One form would pull, forcing the pencil to make a scribble of tone which could re-emphasize its recession; another would jab the pencil into re-stressing a line which could bring it further forward” (Berger, 2005/1960, pp. 8-9).

In drawing I was able to see how individual voices and understandings related over time. Walker (2002) articulates this further in the following quote:

One of the limitations of aural and textual language is its diachronic mode of operation. Our perception of the world is synchronic. Drawing as a means of communication and agent of perception seeks the gestalt, the unity and overall pattern where meaning comes from individual component features operating as a whole. (p. 109)

Like Berger and Berger (2005), I was aware of drawing as an act of “becoming rather than being” (italics from the original, p. 124). I was both flowing with and containing time. Going with time “means losing ourselves... being carried away” (Berger & Berger, 2005, p. 124), while I was also standing back, outside of the moment and continually correcting. “Drawing is this back and forth movement, in and out. Being carried away also implies we have to adjust ourselves to the flow. Dive at the right moment, breathe at the right moment, dive again” (Berger & Berger, 2005, p. 124).
An image surfaced, not unlike the digital recording, as a testimony of its flow through time. My created text, shaped in relation, harkened back to the origin of the word text, as a web of relationships (Davis, Sumara, & Luce-Kapler, 2000). As an image of an unfolding conversation, it traced the forming of ambiguous knowledge.

I entered into the receding spaces and yielded to the oncoming forms. Also, I was correcting: drawing over and across the earlier lines to re-establish proportions or to find a way of expressing less obvious discoveries. (Berger, 2005/1960, p. 7)

Once free from the shackles of pictorial realism, ambiguity was in abundance. While my interpretation of the conversation would not replace the selecting, analyzing, and arranging of the text within my dissertation, it provided another order of data that facilitated a way to play with the interwoven relationships in a different, but nonetheless generative way.

After a while the black paper opens as white paper does. Your eyes get used to the dark. Owl drawing. The white lines are like the echoes of sounds, a bit like the system by which bats (chauve-souris) navigate the dark.

(italics from original, Berger & Berger, 2005, p. 136)
Can an end be “ish”? Is that enough? We had embraced “ish” in our teaching, drawing, and researching, but would others embrace it outside the group? Could the products of our teaching, drawing, and research withstand an “unfin-ish”?

6.1 “Something on the wall”

If an art teacher is committed to not just encouraging students to produce simulacra (copies empty of authenticity), s/he must focus on the actual investigatory procedure of artworks and not solely on the final look of the artwork.

(Gude, 2007, p. 13)

Deirdre: There is still...you've got to have something up on the wall. (2nd interview)

We can only use the word ‘finished’ to say that we have arrived as close as possible to the drawing’s own identity. Otherwise I can’t imagine what ‘finished’ means, if anything.

(Berger & Berger, 2005, p. 130)

Deirdre: I have sort of looked at art as “I got to do this. I don’t know much about this. I’ll just keep them busy with projects and have some pretty things to look at.” (1st interview)

Despite Deirdre’s changes related to teaching art, the expectation that elementary art class activities yield “some pretty things to look at” or that the end result of an art project is appropriate for public display in schools (and conforming of school art norms) remained. Neither of Deirdre’s drawing projects met her criteria for a wall display in her school. The final look of a piece was important to her in ways I had not anticipated. These were projects that she had created and took on for the first time in her teaching without knowing in advance where they might end up.

The lure of project work that is clearly defined with a set idea of end product is less of a risk in that you know where you want to take children in their learning and in their level of finishing. Without this as a goal, the path is unclear and there is a risk that you may not be pleased enough with the resulting product to publicly display it. This is a constraint to exploration as is completing projects within a set amount of time so that students can be properly assessed.
This expectation to display art can be wrapped up with product looking a certain way that can disregard the value of drawing as a process, a of pushing limits, or tracking of learning. Drawing, as a form of learning that partially captures a practice of coming to know, may not appear as finished as other media nor is it necessarily intended for public presentation (Berger, 2005). Drawing is often considered as work you do before painting or in preparation of a final work. It may not come off as “polished.” As a record of process, lines can remain visible even after attempts at erasure. In this way drawing echoes our conversational and transformational processes in that it is always defying prediction and closure.

![Image 65: “Leaf Study,” grade 6 student, dry pastel and pencil](image)

What the leaf project illustrated or traced was a coming to know leaves through observation, line, colour, shape, and media. Deirdre commented in an email that she doubted the school population would “understand the development.”

To: Nadine  
From: Deirdre  
Subject: something on the wall and in the air  
Date: Mon, 8 Jan 2007 22:22:51  
My response to the writing...I think I appreciate the learning that takes place in the projects we did. However, I don’t think the general school population would appreciate a project that didn’t look finished - they wouldn’t understand the development.... Does that add a dimension?  
Deidre

Further, she articulated how she might have displayed them in a “more interesting” way.
Deirdre: I think quite a few of the leaves were lovely. I felt that the finished product didn't look...I felt it was a very valuable exercise and a neat thing to do. But it wasn't a display item the way it ended up, but maybe having the circles on a different paper, choosing a background colour, something that would make it more interesting.... It was the whole trying to put everything on one page and having that as a display piece — I don't think that worked. I think if they had taken a small piece of paper and done their final thing on that I would have put that up.... (2nd interview)

So there were two points she made related to the drawing not working as a display piece: 1) it was not laid out on the paper in an appealing manner, and 2) the drawings themselves were too rough, not "finished enough."

Image 66: "Leaf Study," grade 6 student, dry pastel and pencil

The "finished" look that seemed inexplicable recalled to mind Efland's (1976) "school art style" (p. 38). "School art" is works produced in school by students under the influence of their elementary classroom teacher. These works have conventions and rules that result in a certain "look". Efland (1976) claims that this form of institutional art does not relate to the cultural milieu outside of the school, particularly the art world, but is instead "a function of the school life-style itself" (p. 39). The statement: "Teachers know in advance the look of the products they want and what they don't want" (Efland, 1976, p. 41), did not ring true in connection with Deirdre's leaf observation project or her colouring cat activity and I think this was part of the problem. She did not find the final products "perceptually inviting" (Efland, 1976, p. 42). In order for her students' artworks to be publicly displayed they had to adhere to a certain look.
Despite the artworks not conforming to an appropriate school art style, Deirdre recognized her art projects as facilitative of valuable learning for her and her students. She had often started an art project with evolving expectations and openness to what students would bring to an assignment.

But the fact remained, it was a different kind of art that was not so much motivated by the end look and therefore, in the end, Deirdre’s projects did not make their way to public display. This did frustrate her. It is not unreasonable to expect that if you are going to embark on a research study around drawing, that the projects created under these conditions would improve the product, at least to the point of being comfortable hanging student work in the school hallway. The analogy to a school concert was put forward. You spend the time in school and outside of school time preparing and learning. You get children where you need them to be so that they can perform in front of an audience. Rarely do you let children perform if they do not meet your standards chorally. It follows then that a teacher might not feel comfortable displaying students’ artworks if they do not meet their standards artistically. If the teacher is uncomfortable, it is likely the student will also feel uncomfortable.

*Deirdre:* The one frustration this fall is I don’t have things that can go up on the wall. I haven’t gotten things finished in the way that...

*Susan:* I have the opposite situation. I am sort of going...I had the intention that things would be short projects, but now that I realize there is more to be learned, I’ve slowed down. Stuff doesn’t need to be such a rush job. I don’t have a bulletin board. I don’t have a burning desire to work towards that end. (meeting 11)

Susan more readily displayed student work around the classroom and school. She did not put up student preparatory sketches, but their finished pencil sketches were on display.

When pushed further at the end of the term, Deirdre appeared to be recognizing how limiting it might be to put an emphasis on the creation of end products that were expected to meet her (or school, societal, students’) expectations for wall displays. She was also making it clear to me that she understood learning experiences in art might not have to end up being displayed. This helped me to understand her expectations for art in general and the pressure that teachers might be faced with around sharing student work with parents and the school at large.

*Nadine:*...it wasn’t something you could put on the walls?
Deirdre: Maybe when you put that kind of expectation on art it is unfair. It was a learning experience, but is it something you have to put on the wall? It is nice not to have that pressure. When I want to put something up I can choose to put something up....

Nadine: And that has been your goal – “find a cool idea so I can put it up.” This didn’t work out that way but we didn’t know what it was going to end up looking like. But we didn’t have anything to put up.

Deirdre: When they went home I think it was probably very interesting for parents to see this is what we have been doing. It was a very valid thing. (2nd interview)

Artwork on the wall typically does not reveal the processes that produced the finished work. Susan alluded to this in the following passage referring back to the days that her classroom was across the hall from Richard’s in their former school:

Susan: I always knew that Richard was doing things that were different than I was. I always appreciated his display of children’s artworks. I never saw the thinking behind where and why.

Nadine: For me that is more important than the product on the wall.

Richard: Nobody at school wants to talk about pedagogy. (meeting 12)

It is rare that we get insight into the “where” and “why” – the context and the rationale – behind the final artifacts. The thinking that enabled the project, how this fit in with other aspects of the curriculum, where the idea came from, why it was chosen, all remain hidden from view. Moreover, we do not get a sense of the self-questioning the teacher underwent, the twists and turns while teaching, the students’ reactions, the problems and the unexpected, the regrets, the risks, evaluation considerations, and the remaining questions. We do not know how this fit in and/or did not fit with the teacher’s overall philosophy of art education and their personal relationship or history with drawing. In having the teachers explain and speak to these points, they were teaching about art in ways that were quite different than learning from a bulletin board or even a pre-packaged unit plan. They were providing a rich context that enabled an endless number of connections to happen.
6.2 One Way In

Richard: I can't believe that I taught all day and I don't feel stressed at all. I am doing a total experimental thing. I am using black too. Like Stonehenge style. I am really enjoying this whole crazy thing. I think I am an abstract kind of guy. I like the smudge effect. Who'd of thought a Wednesday night could be so much fun? (meeting 8)

Richard: And what happened while this was going on was that I discovered that I liked painting. Which I didn’t really know…. When you actually said in your email “Why not try painting in response to Mondrian?” You know you pushed and I responded. And what that did for me was realized “Um, I enjoy doing this.” (2nd interview)

Each teacher found ways to bring their personal lives into their teaching. Susan was building a house and she found this a source of drawing ideas. She created a unit of architectural drawing and brought in moldings from the construction site as well as images from building catalogues. Deirdre’s personal experiences with the paintings of Lionel Lemoine Fitzgerald in her youth became a source of curriculum development.

Richard was intrigued by abstraction and in particular the painting of Piet Mondrian. During our summer meeting, Richard brought a book by Greg Tang (Math-terpieces. The Art of Problem-Solving, 2003) that he had purchased a year earlier. Since buying the book he had been ruminating on how he might tackle the teaching of abstract art. At our meeting he asked how he could go beyond getting his students to just imitate the artist’s style.

Richard: I don’t want 20 of the same products that look exactly like Mondrian. I want this to be used as a tool to do something. (1st interview)

I suggested he relate the images to music and consider the narrative potential of the images from students’ perspectives. I also shared my belief that there are multiple ways into art for students to help them interpret and create art that is connected to their lives.

At this point I asked if he would try to do an abstract drawing or painting before teaching the unit.

Richard: I usually do a mock up, sketch it out.

Nadine: Not the full thing.
Richard: I don't want them to copy so that is why I usually do a mock up.

Nadine: Do you think you are more likely to draw with your students or before, not to show an example but to do it yourself?

Richard: I usually do a rough sketch, but what I am getting is it would be a good idea to do it more.

Nadine: What about with your students?

Richard: I am pausing. We use the painting station, so the whole class does not paint at the same time. But with the paint trays the whole class will paint. I think that will change how I will teach. We could do it as a whole class for the first time. Therefore I think I will paint with them.

Nadine: They will get ideas from you.

Richard: They get ideas from each other as well. And I think that is okay. And isn't that what people do in studios anyway? (1st interview)

In the end Richard did not paint or draw with the students during this unit. He did however undertake the project on his own time in response to an email I sent him as the unit was wrapping up in his classroom. My request for Richard to try out his Mondrian unit himself and create a response to Mondrian incorporating a narrative aspect became a way for him to express his feelings about a friend's cancer surgery. In what follows I track in excerpts from emails and recorded conversations the personal process Richard went through in locating a bourgeoning artistic voice.
To: Richard
From: Nadine
Sent: September 27, 2006 10:23:31 PM
Subject: abstract and narrative drawing
...i was wondering what you're doing in art and if you might consider trying something
how about drawing in an abstract style and/or drawing from a narrative like your students did in
response to mondrian?
how would that work for you?
...my request is an attempt to push you a bit
boy, after those ink still-life drawings, i figure you are up for a challenge
nadine

Richard: What we have here is all about cancer. I woke up from sleeping visualizing this. (meeting 9)

To: Nadine
From: Richard
Sent: October 1, 2006 10:03:52 AM
Subject: RE: abstract and narrative drawing ... Some comments
I have started to respond to your Mondrian drawing/painting challenge
suggestion. The abstract related to a story has jelled in my head and form
is appearing on paper.
Richard

Richard: This became my plan. The grey is the hospital – worry, smell of the hospital, the institution, the food.

Image 68: “Pre-Cancer Drawing” by Richard, tempera
The yellow is my friend. This was the finished pre-cancer drawing. The paint made a drop. That is why this looks odd, but I kind of liked it and kept going with it. Then after the surgery, I went to do a post-surgery one. Now healthy....

Image 69: "Post-Surgery Drawing" by Richard, tempera

Nadine: Was this therapeutic?

Richard: This was therapeutic.

Deirdre: What interests me…when we started you shared how you don't feel like an artist. But you totally feel like an artist to me.

Richard: I feel...yeah.

Susan: You find where to put your input, your medium.

Nadine: I did ask him to do this, and within the cracks that I opened you went through.

Richard: I didn’t mind the request.

Nadine: I thought you were ready for it.
Richard: I am a bit shocked at it.

Nadine: How you got into it?

Richard: I am quite close to her. And I just flowed with this. (meeting 9)

Richard: Something occurred to me. I think I am an “ish” drawer. I think it is because of this [pointing to his sunset drawing]. This is what I like. I think I am more abstract. I don’t do regular stuff. I think I like abstraction. I think [the sunset drawing] works because of the “abstraction-ness” – this “Stonehengey”, high-rise, sunset thing. You know what? I didn’t even know I liked this.

Nadine: You were finished first.

Richard: I spent most of my time thinking and analyzing what I was doing and internally mulling over. ‘Why don’t I like this and this?’ I realized I don’t like drawing realistically.

Nadine: So this was more a pleasure to you than the pen drawings? It took a lot of the fun out of it.

Richard: Yes. I started with…I was trying to be literal. I don’t like drawing perfectly what things look like.

(meeting 9)

To: Nadine
From: Richard
Sent: October 21, 2006 10:06:52 AM
Subject: RE: pumpkins ... Class response to looking at real pumpkins and picture books

Nadine....

Ps
I phoned my friend in Mission with cancer and had a long discussion about the paintings. She wanted to view them so a digital file was emailed that day and her email response to the paintings later that night was astounding. Thank you for encouraging me to share the paintings with her as I was feeling a little reluctant/shy about doing that. She has encouraged me to continue with my explorations of painting as a life long endeavour. I don’t know about that but I am thinking about the idea.

Richard

Richard: Her reply was shocking, upfront, and out there. It was like raw communication… There are various ways of responding to someone with cancer. Like “I am sorry” and never again say the word. Let alone paint their tumor….

Nadine: It could heal others.

Susan: It was a bold move.

Richard: It was a request from Nadine. Nadine didn’t know what was going on when she asked me to do a Mondrian drawing. She didn’t know that I was going to wake up at 3 am and start sketching.

Deirdre: It calls you.

Richard: Yes, I do think in pictures anyway. I don’t think of myself as an artist or drawer, but I sort of made notes of what it looked like. Nadine didn’t say draw a tumor.

Deirdre: But you had to have a story for it too.

Richard: and my friend’s condition was on my mind.

Nadine: The power of creation and the power of image. (meeting 11)

To: Richard
From: Nadine
Sent: October 21, 2006 10:54:29 AM
Subject: RE: pumpkins … Class response to looking at real pumpkins and picture books
Richard,
Thank you for sharing where you are at with art in class and in your life.
You seem to have begun to understand that art can have an impact - even your art - through making and/or viewing. This is a lofty goal, but it keeps me coming back to art, time and time again.

Nadine

*Nadine: Do you get joy when you draw?*

Richard: Not always. It is a recent thing. When I don’t dwell on drawing in a realist fashion. [Talking about his own drawings] Some of them I tried to be realistic. And I felt better when I did them abstract. In both pencil and watercolour. I draw in pencil first then do watercolour.
Nadine: Do the pencil drawings always start with realism?

Richard: One of the pencil drawings was realistic and then I did it over “ish” and felt much better. (2nd interview)

Richard: It has been a personal journey. We’ve chosen to go at this in our personal ways. You chose directions from your own interests. For me it has been a surprising time. I have discovered some things that I might mull about when I retire. I do enjoy making my own art.

Nadine: If it is not a personal thing then it does not continue to transform....

Richard: It has also been interesting. The group has been a support for my interest in art. Since I don’t get support for art in my school. Like PE and choir gets support. But the group has helped support my interest. (2nd interview)

Image 73: “Abstract Christmas Trees” by Richard, acrylic

6.3 Freeform

Deirdre: Whenever I would draw and it would start to look like something real, I would change it. (1st interview)

Traditional skills and knowledge do not have to be abandoned but rather reconfigured alongside current forms of practice precipitating new skills, forms of knowledge and ways of understanding. (Atkinson, 2006, p. 24)

For each form, between the pencil marks and the white paper they marked, there was now a door through which moments of a life could enter: the drawing, instead of being simply an object of perception with one face, had moved forward to become double-faced, and worked like a filter, from behind, it drew out my memories of the past whilst, forwards, it projected an image which...was becoming increasingly familiar.

Instead of creating a form, which was rather unfamiliar territory for me in drawing, I decided to work from within a form I already knew. I still wanted to go deeper. For years I had been aware of the agave plants in the backyard of a home that had been in our family since I was a toddler. It was the dead stocks of these plants that I had photographed at the start of my artistic explorations of this research.

Within this drawing I was conscious of what I was focusing on in relation to the agave and the voices I was listening to. I chose what to highlight, what to ignore, change, transform, reconfigure while listening to the audio of our 10th meeting. Nothing was spared my mediation. A line was like a voice. A colour was a topic. Lines and colours were layered just as voices and ideas were intermingled. I smudged and erased as we interrupted and restated, remembered and reacted. I started the base with the neutral colours of the agave and then built up from there as the conversation took on its own pattern. This pattern was not unlike the relationships, lines, colours, and contours of the agave leaf. In these ways our conversations were drawings. Our voices were the layers, colours, lines, and connections, in contact, and reiteration. Akin to the sharing of ideas in the group, as I drew, my strokes and touch were shaped in reaction to lines and colours and areas that had been laid before me. As understandings were worked on and became clearer in the conversation, I would work in a particular area, almost to a point of correspondence with the agave leaf that was before me. Then the topic would evolve and I would move on to another section or colour on the page.

Image 74: “Untitled” by Nadine, dry pastel
The surface of the leaf came in and out of focus within moments of stability and instability, as did the conversation. There were no outlines, few hard edges, and the urge for accuracy gave way to a desire for some ambiguity. The impossibility of doing either form justice was the tension I was exploring: how it felt to be made aware of this futility. Within this impossibility and the juxtaposition there was an interplay of unity and multiplicity. The forms echoed and mirrored each other in strange ways. Humankind and nature were in relation as I remade nature in response to human voices and heard the familiar patterns of voices echoed in the surface of the agave. I detected a sense of harmony in their difference and in the dynamic interaction between different energies – sight and sound. What is perceived, ignored, and filtered? How do I make sense of what I see through the conventions I am familiar with in a drawing? What is said, unsaid, and understood in conversation? How do I make meaning of what I hear through the textual format of a dissertation? In these questions there was a reciprocal play of ideas and connections. Information was coming to me through my senses and I was made more aware of how I sift through experience. I acted as a bridge, a filter in between the gaps that distinguished sound from image.

For the artist drawing is discovery…. It is the actual act of drawing that forces the artist to look at the object in front of him, to dissect it in his mind’s eye and put it together again…. It is a platitude in the teaching of drawing that the heart of the matter lies in the specific process of looking. A line, an area of tone, is not really important because it records what you have seen, but because of what it will lead you on to see.

(Berger, 2005/1960, p. 3)

I was pulling from the compositional choices I was familiar with to give some visual form to what I was experiencing. I was aware that these choices were based on and modulated through my previous learning and understanding of the conventions of pictorial realism and the possibilities of the medium of dry pastels. But in this process, I slowed down and tried to be more attentive of my impulses to modulate, take in, and “build up form.” This experience imbued my drawing with meaning. I was thinking about what I was drawing, while I was trying to make sense out of the decisions I was making in response to the two stimuli. In the bringing together of two forms, I was caught up with destabilizing one through the other and upsetting my foci of perception as a drawer, listener, and viewer.

I was returning to form in my drawing. There were voices, not only from the ipod, but my own voice that was calm and in the moment considering what I was doing and finding endless connections. It was not quiet or judgmental. Meaning and form and perception were communing.

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Analogous to our conversations, this drawing would remain unfinished with unlaid layers that could be added and parts that might be erased and/or worked over. I actually had to fight against my instinct to take this visual response to a finished point, to what I thought of as a clearly recognizable form. It was such a habit to tie up loose ends and take something to a point of resolution. I tried to remain open.

6.4 Fugue State

In the early fall, a critical friend outside of the study suggested a drawing activity that I had actually forgotten. It was a collaborative drawing game, where someone draws and then another person draws in response. Wilson and Wilson (1979, 1981) wrote about this as “graphic dialogues” where an adult and a child draw and talk together, one learning from the other. I had previously undertaken this with my own grade 7 students working in pairs around a theme of their choosing. I knew that this would be the opening activity during our final meeting together because it would take us through a visual process that metaphorically (re)presented our relational research over the year.

Collaborative drawing is not new. The process of beginning a drawing and then passing it on to another for completion or extension bears comparison to the Surrealist artists’ game of “The Exquisite Corpse” from the 1920s where sheets of paper are folded so several people can contribute to the drawing of a figure without seeing what the others have already drawn (Hofmann, 1996; Philbrick, 1993). More recently, John Berger and Marisa Camino, whose collaborative drawings are worked on individually and
then received by the other in the mail, have been an ongoing undertaking for over the past decade. The Royal Art Lodge collaborative drawings are worked on during group meetings. These processes and artworks confront the persistent myth of the artist as isolated genius. This tag-team approach involves at least two processes simultaneously. The artist must first take in the other’s mark and attempt to inhabit the motivations behind it, while at the same time consider their own vision for the direction of the piece, always in relation to the marks already left behind. Each mark traces the artist in the act of response to what is before him or her, just as the sounds, body movements, and phrases performed in conversation track our responding to others. One has little control over where this activity will lead or how a response will be taken up by another.

![Image 76: Detail of collaborative drawing](image76.png)  ![Image 77: Detail of collaborative drawing](image77.png)

While we were undertaking this collaborative drawing, I asked them to consider any metaphoric connections to the process.

Richard: *For me the metaphor is... Just jumping in and doing things as a group in an eclectic way. Learning and playing and passing stuff around. These are tools for playing and learning about art.*

Deirdre: *I just had a musical metaphor. It is a fugue. Somebody starts and then the next one comes in and it joins together and there are different themes that come in. In the fugue you might take up the little bits the way you are doing it right now and then echo it. I quite like the way it looks. I would say this is a metaphor for the group.*

Nadine: *Just like in our meetings, sometimes someone does or says something and then we are shocked and then by the next time we meet it is integrated and reframed in a different way so we all understand it.* (meeting 12)
It was intriguing to me that they made the connection between this drawing and our conversations in the group. I was not sure they would make that leap. It had taken me a while to appreciate and facilitate the possibilities of our group meetings working as open systems. At the start, for all of us, the group configuration was more about perceiving me as leader, the only teacher and researcher, the expert with all the answers and them as my students. As time went on and I shared my trepidation that I thought I might be too overbearing, as I had the occasion to co-teach alongside the teachers in their classrooms, and I took up more of their preoccupations and needs in directing the group, I think they began to see all of us on more a level playing field. By the end of the project, the idea that we were participating in a type of fugue made sense to them. Wikipedia defines fugue as the following:

**In music, a fugue is a type of contrapuntal composition. It begins with a theme stated by one of the voices playing alone. A second voice then enters and plays the same theme, though usually beginning on a different degree of the scale, while the first voice continues on with a contrapuntal accompaniment. The remaining voices enter one by one, each beginning by stating the same theme (with their first notes alternating between the same two different degrees of the scale). A common pattern of entry notes is tonic-dominant-tonic-dominant (or the same in reverse). The remainder of the fugue develops the material further using all of the voices and, usually, multiple statements of the theme.**

Within this group and this drawing activity we were in the process of performing a fugue. A mark was created (a word was spoken, an utterance voiced) by a single person, and then complemented or extended by another (through mark, voice, or utterance). Conversation and drawing and fugue are indivisible in this way; they are all a type of game. We were in the act of spontaneously composing ourselves as teachers of drawing in relation, just as we were collaboratively bringing our drawing into being. No one perspective or mark appeared in isolation, no one voice or mark owned the process or results, there was co-ownership, co-creation, and co-mentorship.

This drawing was like the open system that our group was continually becoming, a polyphonic composition. The characteristics of drawing: spontaneity, creative speculation, modesty of means, experimentation, expressiveness, immediacy, personal vision, technical diversity, rawness, discovery, fragmentation, discontinuity, unfinishedness, and open endedness (Craig-Martin, 1997) were all features of our participation in the project as teachers, researchers, drawers, and learners. The drawing would act as a physical embodiment of our working together, a record of us in relation that was a different type of documentation from the voice recordings and transcripts. I think using an implement instead of a voice made us even more aware of what we were doing. We paused, we considered, and we remembered every time we were required to transform the piece. We could see how things evolved. Our first marks were recorded and able to be reconsidered every time another person approached the work and added to it. This
tracing of our collective thinking allows for a stepping back, a reconstructing of actions taken, a reviewing of assumptions, and a “connecting our experiences with others’ experiences, building a network or experiences wherein past, present, and future are interrelated” (Doll, 1993, p. 141).

It symbolized how we had worked together, not only in its creation, but also over the course of the entire project. In the group we would each communicate, lead, provisionally understand, confuse, frustrate, go through the motions, influence, misunderstand, shift, rest in uncertainty, comfort, mimic, and we would do all of this in relation to each other and to our own histories and internal dialogues. In this act of drawing, each of us receives from the other a new configuration, another fragment within an open composition that we respond to and take further – amend, erase, reorganize, draw over, integrate, play off, ignore, echo, until one decides that it is “finished”. In these ways the collaborative drawing embodies a type of conversation, not of words, but of marks. We could not have created this drawing on our own. It could only come into existence through a collusion and collision of minds, sensibilities, and actions, colours, lines, shapes, and materials. We become together, just as the drawing comes into being. Diverse perspectives are explored. At the moment we think we understand, a different dynamic emerges releasing new, possibly conflicting thoughts, and synergies. We become aware of our attachments, our egos, and our perspectives when confronted with how another inevitably misinterprets, traverses, or transcends our intentions.

At one moment we catch a glimpse of understanding, only to be thrown into flux when another’s mark interrupts the basis of our comprehending. It is almost like we cannot help but assume the other participants’ appreciation of our intentions, as if we all enter into a new pact after each mark is completed, a pact whose rules keep emerging. Within this ambiguity in midst of moments of perhaps mistaken certainty we are invited “to respond playfully: to delight in the irony of trying to do the right thing and to be reasonable, even while acknowledging the conceptual tyranny of such notions” (italics from original, Davis, 2005, p. 123). At each moment of contribution there is a mini-crisis where one asks oneself “Why did s/he not understand where I was going with my mark?” “Why was my mark ignored?” “Why did they go in that direction?” “What does that person want me to do with his or her mark?” “How am I to understand the piece now?” “How did s/he come up with that?” “How did we get here?” Again, this parallels the processes of research, conversation, teaching, and learning – an ever-mindful apprehension of coming to a provisional and evolving understanding in relation, never knowing for sure.

The participants had been cognizant of the ecological character of the research project. They had continually recognized how they were impacted by each other in their teaching and conceptions of
drawing. Through this drawing they were illuminating and reflecting back how their work as a group “was co-specified, co-emergent and co-dependent, creating a rhythm particular to that group in that time and place” (Luce-Kapler, Sumara, & Davis, 2002, p. 365). Each person’s contribution to the drawing and conversations during group meetings over the course of the project was individual, but it was taken up in relation to other marks and perspectives within the collective drawing and group contributing to the interdependence and coherence of the whole. In the midst of this shared action, this commingling of marks and lived actions, the co-emergence (Varela, Thompson, & Rosch, 1991) of consciousness allows for the possibility of actions and understandings to emerge that likely could not have arisen from participants in isolation (Davis & Sumara, 1997).

Conversation is a process of coming to an understanding. Thus it belongs to every true conversation that each person opens himself to the other, truly accepts his point of view as valid and transposes himself into the other to such an extent that he understands not the particular individual but what he says.

(Gadamer, 1992, p. 385)

Over the course of this study, self-concepts related to drawing were jostled from their firmly planted foundations. We suspended disbelief, suppressed our egos, listened to understand, and tried on new ways of thinking and doing in relation to others. There was flux in how we identified the role of teacher, drawer, artist, expert, novice, and researcher. Wikipedia in part defines a fugue state as “confusion about personal identity, or the assumption of a new identity.” So, we were in an extended fugue state of “not being sure.” Losing ourselves while meeting the Other, attending to the Other while relating to ourselves. All the while attempting to remain completely open to what would occur next, to who would make the next statement, wherever the mark would lead.

Furthermore, this drawing imaged the impossibility of ever fully knowing “the confluence and influence of the research moments and contexts” (Luce-Kapler, Sumara, & Davis, 2002, p. 369). I could rarely predict how a mark would be taken up by another in the group. This recalled the unpredictability of the collaborative research and my unknowing of what would happen next in response to research moments. I had to remain attentive, open to mindfully watching and listening to each experience without knowing the consequence of particular actions. Although I could play a part in setting up conditions for the meetings that would offer opportunities for the sharing of insights (such as this drawing activity), I could not predetermine the paths, learning events, or insights that might emerge from a co-created research context.
Just as our drawing revealed, the boundaries of possibility within our collaborative project were porous, shifting, and open to multiple voices, perspectives, visions, and directions.

Image 78: Collaborative drawing, mixed media

Nadine: It is funny how I started with the black line.

Deirdre: It is gone.

All: Laughing.

Nadine: That would be the goal of me as a researcher: To leave my ego at the door. It wasn't always easy.

Deirdre: I quite like this. We should actually each have an image of this to admire.
Nadine: This to me is what we were doing, but I didn’t realize it till quite late. It was more about my voice and my issues, my priorities being the most important. We were doing stuff together and you were telling me “Back off,” “That is too much.” I had to deal with what you guys wanted to do. Which is so different than how I conceptualized teaching. You think you can go from point a to point b with little resistance. In taking on the role of teacher in this group, with my ulterior motives, it didn’t always work. And at those moments I had to question. “What am I doing? What are we doing? What is the meaning of my research question?” – which was “How do you learn, change, and grow?” I shouldn’t have chosen the path. It was up to you guys to choose your own directions. And you each did. (meeting 12)

6.5 The Practice of Drawing

Nadine: You like painting?

Richard: Yes.

Nadine: Separate from your classroom?

Richard: I discovered I liked doing what I did. And I had never done that before and I bought some watercolours.

Nadine: You bought yourself watercolours?

Richard: Yes, for me. (2nd interview)

The teachers did not consider themselves a/r/tographers. In requiring them to create Me Maps for our 2nd meeting where they visually explored their narrative experiences with drawing, I had anticipated that this activity would set the tone for future investigations connecting their teaching, imaging, and researching. In listening to them describe their maps and in my own creation of a Me Map, I realized the frustration,
embarrassment, and effort it took these teachers to think in this way and share with others. I decided to focus more on their needs in drawing than on my agenda for their artistic involvement.

Consequently, they took up drawing for largely instrumental purposes. Montgomery-Whicher (2001) described this instrumental orientation as a “practice in the service of mastery or preparation for other works” (p. 12). Although they all agreed that drawing added an important element to their learning in this study, the participants drew to better understand how to render an observed reality with more verisimilitude. Susan also drew in her class to teach students concepts. Deirdre too drew to explore materials and techniques that she would use in teaching drawing. Richard undertook drawing for the same purposes.

In contrast, “[d]rawing as a practice is a way of thinking about drawing which seems to be more inclusive than thinking of drawing practice primarily to practice skills or to do preparatory work for the production of works of art” (italics from original, Montgomery-Whicher, 2001, p. 12). This type of practice uses drawing not as a means to an end (to get better at observational drawing), but as a way to inquire into something and trace the making of meaning. So it is more about what is revealed in the process of this practice than in practicing for mastery.

Yet, the practical approach to practicing drawing in this way did not prevent us from coming to appreciate some of the “rich layer of lived meaning which lies below the surface” (Montgomery-Whicher, 2001, p. 12) of students’ drawings through our discussions and sharing of class work.

Richard: *I think I have moved forward in some degree. I never thought about art. I never thought of it below the surface. I was just looking for something interesting to do in my class. I didn’t deconstruct the way we do here and analyze and think about it and look at the layers below.* (meeting 10)

Intriguingly, about halfway through the study, Richard went beyond drawing for teaching and increased skill in the conventions of pictorial realism. He drew and painted for personal interest. This process was calming and recreational. He enjoyed the process and within abstraction, his style of choice, the pressures of mastery were diminished. To me this practice was somewhere in the middle between drawing (and painting) to practice and drawing as a practice. By the conclusion of this study, Richard was the only teacher-participant that was beginning to consider himself an artist. But this budding identity did not lend itself to exploring the connections between research, creating, and teaching. At this point, his art making was for himself.
Richard: I actually went to the art gallery and bought a whole bunch of props for painting — calendars from famous abstract painters — because I thought I could learn from them.

Nadine: And use them in your classroom?

Richard: I bought them for me actually. But I could use them in my classroom too. The reason I bought them was for me so I could start playing with abstract art. (2nd interview)

That said, the collaborative drawing undertaken during our last meeting provided and enabled what one might call an artographic space. The visual imaging of our fugue state reflected how we had come into contiguity, provided openings, were immersed in a living inquiry, and shifted each other’s perspectives. It is possible that our experiences together might transform into possibilities for drawing, inquiry, and teaching to gather again in proximity. One can only plant the seed.
CHAPTER 7 UNDERSTANDINGS OF CHANGE

Susan: I am sure we all had trepidation. But we are all richer for it. (2nd interview)

I approached the end just as I had approached the beginning – somewhat close-minded in the face of the unknown, relying on familiar ways, resisting. Analyzing our data on my own I slipped back into old habits of reducing, crunching, and controlling. It was again through sharing with others that my understandings were invited to change.

7.1 Areas of Change

Richard: I could take that biology course now. (2nd interview)

Richard: What I've gone through and the experiences have changed me…. I didn’t know I could transform. (2nd interview)

Not unlike the non-art specialist preservice teachers studied by Grauer (1998), the teacher-participants in this research group held beliefs that were dynamic and evolving. In reviewing the data, I recognized change occurring in three areas: teachers/researchers’ understanding of students as drawers, their own artistic processes in drawing, and the teaching of drawing. Through reflecting on their classroom initiatives, teacher/researchers acquired a more refined awareness of their students’ needs, abilities, and relationships with drawing.

Deirdre: I think I've learned… I am looking at art in a different way. I have sort of looked at art as “I got to do this. I don’t know much about this. I’ll just keep them busy with projects and have some pretty things to look at.” And instead I should have some development of skills. And I have a toehold into where I can focus them in....

Nadine: How did that come up in group? How did you come to the conclusion that you needed to do that?

Deirdre: It is not so much that I had to, but that I could. That I had enough understanding of what I was doing that if I put a little bit more effort into my focus that I could do something, that I could teach something, that I understood some of what the kids needed to learn. (1st interview)
In addition, the notions of talent and creativity as inborn were re-conceived in relation to drawing.

*Nadine:* It took them 6-8 weeks to get comfortable with drawing.

*Susan:* I don’t know if these kids are extra compliant....

*Nadine:* It doesn’t take a lifetime. It can take 8 weeks. I have never done that with students. “Let’s just draw for 8 weeks.” You did it. Most of these kids would say they could draw.

*Susan:* With the exception of two students, yeah.

*Nadine:* It could be a compliant group, could be a group of drawers, but I did see improvement over 6-8 weeks. That is incredible because none of us had this gift in elementary school. That is a gift.

*Susan:* In elementary school I had this “Let’s cut this out.” “Let’s glue this down.” (2nd interview)

Susan made numerous connections between her autobiography and her students’ current educational experiences.

*Nadine:* There has been a progression of building skills and extension and building on things.

*Susan:* That was my fear and then having addressed that to a degree there has been...that was what I felt I didn’t have and that is why it is important for students.... (2nd interview)

There was also an increasing awareness and expansion of interpretative frames.

*Susan:* I see more things as being creative as opposed to primitive. (2nd interview)

*Richard:* I am looking at art and painting in a different way.

*Nadine:* You are seeing things through different lenses. I think this point has been the spirit of the group...It will never be the same again.

*Richard:* Yes. (2nd interview)
As teachers gained confidence in their drawing abilities, they went from drawing discouraged towards drawing encouraged. Additionally they gained an appreciation of drawings’ usefulness in the act of teaching – which translated into them experimenting with drawing in advance of teaching, drawing in front of students, and drawing with students.

Richard: *Our confidence increased because of the scaffolding provided by you that propelled us further.* (2nd interview)

Deidre: *I have been happier with my drawing.* (1st interview)

Nadine: *Has your drawing improved?*

Susan: *I think so.* (2nd interview)

Teachers augmented their practical knowledge of media, processes, and techniques while enhancing their fluency in the language of drawing and art. They all connected artists’ processes, art works, and styles into their units.

Nadine: *Do you still think you don’t teach much in art?*

Deirdre: *I feel like I’ve got something more to offer. I have more of a framework. I have more ideas about colour. I have some directions to go with an artist and how that ties into other things I do. I am very excited about that. To me that was a huge re-discovery. It was a revelation.* (2nd interview)

Their repertoires of teaching possibilities in drawing were expanded. The teacher-researchers incorporated alternative approaches in the planning and teaching of drawing. They also committed more time, materials, instruction and support for students’ art making.

Richard: *I love this fluid definition for drawing and that is something else you blew me away with. I always thought that drawing was this and painting was paint... That is something else that really exploded in my head. So I didn’t know much about drawing until last year and so drawing is going to flavour everything I do.* (1st interview)

Nadine: *You relied less on your husband. You did your own thing more.*

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Susan: Yes.... I do feel like I have a larger repertoire. I have 15-20% more competence than last year. (2\textsuperscript{nd} interview)

Susan in particular planned longer, related units in art.

Susan: Sometimes it is not like you have a vision of where you are going with stuff. You have a vague thing. And what I think I have been able to do this year more than anything else is extension, extension. (2\textsuperscript{nd} interview)

Susan: ...I did more building, I don’t mean buildings, but building on skills, skill building. I have done more teaching in art than ever before.... I mean direct teaching. “What are we going to be doing?” “What are we focusing on?” “I show you.” We do it....

Nadine: But in the past you did step-by-step.

Susan: Okay, but that is: “Add this.” “Add this.”

Nadine: It is not like extending the Santa mobile.

Susan: I could always come up with things that were crafty. Like those parrot mobiles. And through my husband I can come up with things that were crafty. But when you start to think about skill-building stuff. I wasn’t sort of at the board – “I want you to notice.” Maybe last year I would say – “You know this building.” “Get going.”

Nadine: If I sat in on one lesson last year and this year, the lessons might be the same, but if I look at it over the course of 6 weeks it is quite different.

Susan: If I compare me with my student teacher. I would put her in my boots. When she did art it was like – “Here is a photocopy. You draw on the photocopy.”

Nadine: Busy work. The old Susan was like that?

Susan: Not really that cut and dry because I had my husband. But it comes back to...you have that appreciation and then recognize. And then you think about you know in math I teach math it is a step-by-step process. I teach language arts, I don’t have the expectation that the kids are going to just sit down and write I am going to teach them how to write.
Nadine: So they are slowly going to get better over the year. That is a process you keyed into. As opposed to “Let’s just keep it going with cool, interesting projects,” without necessarily seeing any transfer. (2nd interview)

They acquired a deeper appreciation of inquiry and consciousness related to their teaching of drawing; the unplanned, mistakes, and surprises inherent in their teaching were increasingly met with curiosity.

Susan: I think I have done more teaching this fall. There has been more direct teaching. Not just here is the product. It is more process.... I think about things in a more prolonged way. (meeting 12)

Deirdre: I have been pushed to think through art in a way I don’t usually do. I feel I can experiment more....

(meting 11)

Richard: This year art was more of a focus and it was intellectualized in a different way. (2nd interview)

When I shared the three areas of change I was detecting, Deirdre went on to add:

Deirdre: We really increased our vocabulary and ways of talking about art too....

Nadine: It is more than just drawing. I can’t keep denying it is more than just drawing. There is the vocab about art and drawing. It has broadened your understanding about art, not just drawing.

Deirdre: Totally. (2nd interview)

7.2 Transformation

To: Nadine
From: Susan
Sent: November 7, 2006 5:41:06 PM
Subject: RE: feedback what was it like??? having Nadine in the classroom.
...See how I’ve grown...even I can recognize it... this is what pro d should be like... action research...now I get it...
Susan (original punctuation)

Susan: For me to listen to a lecture – it gets me thinking but it doesn’t change my practice. Not just thinking about it but actually changing practice. Where this is different is that it is really getting you to change practice. (2nd interview)
It occurred to me that in the context of our action research group, we were partaking in the conditions and processes necessary for adults to make knowledge change that roughly paralleled Mezirow’s (1991, 1998, 2000) transformative learning theory. Mezirow (1991) defines a perspective transformation as

[t]he process of becoming critically aware of how and why our assumptions have come to constrain the way we perceive, understand, and feel about our world; changing these structures of habitual expectation to make possible a more inclusive, discriminating, and integrative perspective; and finally making choices or otherwise acting on these new understandings. (p. 167)

Transformative learning is in clear contrast to the more common process of assimilative learning, the type of learning that takes place when students simply acquire new information that can easily fit into their pre-existing knowledge structures. A significant barrier to learning for mature students is the extent to which established perceptions, values, and beliefs can filter and block their ability to transform their understanding of the world in which they live (Mezirow, 1990, 1991, 1998, 2000). If transformative learning is seen as the process of continually transforming perceptions through reflection, then challenging existing frameworks becomes a necessary part of the learning process if new meaning is to be made. Under these conditions facilitators need to structure opportunities for adults to work through crises in meaningful ways. Certainly there will be resistance to change, but in Kumashiro’s (2004) view this resistance should not be viewed as something to be overpowered. Rather, discomfort and resistance “should become part of the very things that [we] study” (p. 24).

Transformative learning may be summarized as a process of consistent engagement in cycles of inquiry supported by transformative conditions. One may recognize that this theory echoes hermeneutic philosophy and the methods of action research. But it also provided a body of literature focusing on change in adult learners that proved instructive.

Not unlike transformative learning theory, change for these teachers was enabled through several conditions and processes including:

- An Activating Event
- Identifying and Articulating Current Assumptions
- Encouraging Critical Self-Reflection
- Engaging in Critical Discourse
- Opportunities to Test and Apply New Perspectives in their Teaching
There were multiple triggers for each of us that set off an examination of our thinking including questions and comments by group members, students’ reactions to drawing lessons, and the creation of the participants’ own drawings. But not all triggers worked the first time, and some that I instigated did not work for any of the teachers. There were numerous opportunities to identify and articulate our underlying assumptions. Here I (and eventually the other teachers/researchers) would ask why a participant held a particular view and how they came to this belief. The action research activities and context led the participants to articulate and critically reflect on their assumptions and perspectives. This also occurred outside of the group meetings, as the participants absorbed and integrated what happened in the group or in their classrooms. Often times this process surprised me. I would assume a teacher was unwilling or unable to perceive things differently because of the views they clung to during group meetings, and then on their own, they had researched a new artist, or enlarged their purposes for teaching drawing, or perceived something as drawing that they had not been willing to do during our group meetings. For transformational learning to move from thought to action, there need to be opportunities to apply new knowledge. It was the critical interaction between the study group and the settings in which the teachers worked that helped them to reconstruct their practices.

Overall, instead of a linear, sequential process, transformation in this study was more complex, recursive, and evolving. Teachers stepped in and out of the processes during the study. Sometimes they didn’t realize they were teaching something in a new way until after a lesson was completed, and then they would often recognize an assumption and critically reflect all at the same time. Within one meeting, all of these processes could be going on at once, with each individual making connections, asking questions, providing support, playing devil’s advocate, sharing an experience, and articulating a belief. These processes were also apparent in email interactions among the participants, within classroom teaching experiences, in the course of conversations with people outside the group, while planning drawing lessons, and during periods when the group members were drawing. Furthermore each bit of dialogue or utterance revealed only part of an ongoing dialogue participants were having with themselves. At certain points, teachers were able to partake in discussions with the group, but were unwilling to incorporate specific insights into their teaching. Conversely, it was not always clear if a teacher really appreciated his or her assumptions before they took up a new initiative in their classrooms. And the conscious trying out of new understandings were rarely crowning moments of complete transformation, with teachers going back to the drawing board, so to speak, and reworking what they thought they had understood.

7.3 Processes of Change
To: Drawing Group  
From: Richard  
Sent: December 2, 2006 11:59:27 AM  
Subject: The Amazing Art Research Group ... 2nd part  
The past year...should be the model for most pro d.  
Richard

Susan: The whole point is we are doing things differently. Whether or not we are able to continue ourselves outside of this group and the bouncing off of ideas. We are all borrowing ideas from each other this is about collaboration. There has been a little push. And I push some of the kids more too. To me that is what this is about.

Nadine: I have to say that you all keep telling me about your changes your little shifts. And you are constantly telling me about these moments. I realize how hard it is to make these shifts. (meeting 9)

Susan: So basically each of us was able to take away what we were ready to take away and we tried more than we thought we would ever try.

Nadine: And you've also wrestled yourselves away from, out of that disabling self-talk about drawing and art. It may still be there but you are able to live with that and leave it to the side. All three of you came in with shackles on. But you have all calmed down.

Susan: Yeah. (2nd interview)

In addition to Mezirow’s learning processes, we found additional facets to transformative pedagogy within our group including partaking in drawing, enabling participant autonomy, acknowledging the affective, fostering intellectual openness, facilitator acting as co-learner, and learning in relation. The practice of drawing was crucial. The experiential, embodied act of drawing facilitated teachers returning to the feelings and conditions they themselves had experienced in their youth, thereby sensitizing them to their own students’ learning processes. While the practice of drawing increased their confidence, it also helped participants learn to rest in insecurity and the unknowns of teaching.

Participant autonomy was enabled through a democratic and open learning situation in which teacher/researchers were involved in negotiating the intent and direction of the group. And this placing of teachers at the centre of their own learning contributed to their self-motivated transformation. In this context the teacher-researchers were able to pursue what was of interest to them. Richard’s personal interest in painting provides an example of this.
Richard: Listening to each other – why we chose a project, what we were doing in our art class. A lot of them involved our personal interests. I was trying to learn new ways of teaching art because I wanted to try new things. I don’t have much time left as a teacher so I want to try new things. (2nd interview)

We needed to establish and continually attend to the affective aspects of change. Our goal was to maintain a learning environment that fostered feelings of safety, support, and trust. This was central for each of us to share in-process thinking and never-before examined personal beliefs.

Intellectual openness involved the embracing of conflict and resistance as learning opportunities. In their resistances I learned about their limits at that moment and always questioned why – this was key. Their justifications made sense within their current understanding of classroom contexts and personal comfort, ability, and knowledge. I respected these moments. They were consciously thought through and explained. And I better understood what they were willing to do and why. I also came to know the limits of our processes and how shifts could happen outside of our time together, away from my ipod recorder, my eyes, and my further questioning.

A facilitator that is both willing to learn and change themselves while encouraging others to learn seemed to go a long way. I did not have all the answers and my learning to teach drawing was repeatedly communicated as a never-ending process. I was a co-learner.

Richard: I think you were a co-learner. (2nd interview)

Richard and Susan commented on how working with me in their classrooms as co-teacher and mentor furthered their reflection and change. It allowed for the further exploration and integration of the many possibilities our meetings touched on.

Susan: That is the beauty of having someone to bounce something off of “Didn’t think it was going to happen that way”…. And we may never go back to what the original intention was.

Nadine: I did not expect that working with you would be like this. We really are co-inquirers in the class.

Susan: That is a huge luxury. We all know that if it is Thursday, I ask my husband “What I am doing?”…. I guess this “collaborativeness” has allowed me to do a lot more reflection. Instead of “Okay. It is Thursday and
what are we doing?” It is more “It is Thursday and how are we extending what we are doing?” And that is huge learning for me. (meeting 11)

I began my classroom visits expecting to just observe, but right from the start I was consulted, I asked questions, made comments, and debriefed with the teachers. I was acting in the role of critical friend and if they wanted help planning or implementing an activity, I would offer advice. While teaching was underway, we would share reflections on the direction of a lesson and the students’ responses.

Richard: Reminds me of a student/teacher relationship. Very dynamic and helpful. Like a mentor. Two people teaching, one with more information. The conversation.

Susan: I had the same thought about the same student/teacher relationship. It was the same kind of feeling. The student teacher last year… I kept telling her this has to be a partnership. That we are collective. That is how it feels. (meeting 11)

Susan: In the classroom we were learning together in practice, not abstraction. (2nd interview)

Richard: The meetings, the books, materials, experiencing the teaching techniques, and the gentle nudging forward, were all profound learning opportunities. In the classroom: You have awakened the sleeping drawer student in me. I am really looking at how I teach art. I want to use new and different materials in class. I want to slow down and give the students more choices. The past year has been profound…. (meeting 11)

These teachers identified that they learned the most from each other. In many of the studies in support of transformational learning theory, there has been a lack of recognition of the role of relational knowing and an overemphasis on the essentiality of individual critical reflection. My research recognizes that through the building of trusting relationships, learners develop the necessary openness and confidence to deal with learning on an affective level.

7.4 Open-Ended, Until the End

This growth process, interactive and personal by nature, will not proceed in a linear, sequential, accumulative, and sable manner; rather, it will occur sporadically and spontaneously as each individual builds a rich matrix of representations, utilizing multiple perspectives, consciousness presuppositions, and personal subjectifications.

(Doll, 1993, p. 124)
Susan: Sometimes you are not conscious of what you are doing but you can see you are doing things differently. (1st interview)

While the participants claimed that their involvement within the research project had been transformational, when I shared Mezirow’s transformative learning theory as a way of framing our experiences, for the teachers it came up short.

Deirdre: Those are fairly general. (2nd interview)

Richard: It was personal too. (2nd interview)

Here again I was presented with the opportunity to acknowledge and explore the residues of my positivistic paradigm. I had attempted to be open-ended, until the end. As Doll (1993) describes, “Connecting and transforming modernism with ‘post’ thinking will not be easy…. It is only ‘natural’ to talk of imposing order, connecting effects with causes, transmitting ideas, and finding truth” (pp. 249-250). I had a sense that the step-wise nature of the framework was limited and simplistic; it certainly could not contain my change or re-present my evolving journey in relation.

Mezirow’s transformative learning theory suggested rational and structural underpinnings that could not encompass the fuller sense of the simultaneously emergent and mutual processes we were immersed in without severely abstracting them. The dynamism and messiness of our change was flattened out once it was placed within a teleological framework with fixed processes and end points. The complex, recursive, and personal nature of our experiences defied simple categorization and generalized steps. I was reminded of Bernstein’s (1992) appeal for educators to strive not to control, predict, repress, understand, and master the Other. In honoring the singularity of all we are responsible as human beings to fight against reducing the plurality of the Other to a straightforward understanding.

Our individual and collective accounts eluded charting in this reductive format. Mezirow’s steps were unable to accommodate the twists, obscure connections, unresolved dilemmas, irony, misfires, and redundancy that layered our transformations. It did not do our group processes justice. It lacked our stories.

I have tried not to proceed in this research in a stable or predetermined manner, I have not attempted to (re)present the data in a linear fashion, and it therefore should follow that I will endeavour not to reduce our experience within a framework that claims universality. While Mezirow’s theory is reductive of our
experiences, I have opted to retain it as a trace of my thinking. I have also provided, in the above sections, numerous caveats and addendums to his framework in an effort to better reflect our specific experiences of change.

While the teachers’ areas of change were enabled by a number of factors within the research project, there still needs to be an analysis of what has been learned by this undertaking. Specifically, what have I come to know about our understandings and resistances through the processes of research? How has my story of change overlapped with the other teacher-researchers’ narratives?

### 7.5 Working Theories of Change and Resistance

These teachers found much utility in adopting action research as living inquiry. This provided them with an open-ended and evolving process that catered to their own questions and needs. It was a praxis space whereby they could implement their learning in drawing, while learning from their students’ drawings. Drawing within this context was intended to facilitate their professional learning; we were most successful when approaches to drawing were tied to instructional purposes. The sharing of student projects and the teachers’ own reactions to these projects within the group added multiple layers of understanding that fed back into their teaching. These features of collaborative action research were essential to their change processes as teacher-researchers. They also motivated them to continue with their inquiries, to ask more questions, and delve more deeply into their teaching and student learning related to drawing. If I had focused the research only on what I wanted them to do (my versions of drawing curriculum, an embracing of contemporary art, and an adherence to the processes of a/r/tography), then I may have stunted their personal commitments to inquiry and transformation on their own terms. The teachers need to determine the parameters of their own change and research foci.

On my part, action research as living inquiry concerned my learning from them, their willingness, limitations, and evolving understandings. My assumptions at the onset that they would adopt drawing as an artistic practice that would feed into their research and teaching, that they would embrace my version of post-modern and visual cultural approaches to art education, and that they would integrate contemporary artworks into their teaching were met with resistances that have helped me to understand how non-art specialist teachers perceive drawing. Perhaps because of our existing relationships I have been privy to their open opposition to my priorities. In these resistances I had to reconfigure what I deemed possible for these teachers. The sharing of these assumptions and the ensuing resistances may
provoke other art educators to reconsider their objectives in teacher education and professional
development initiatives for non-art specialist teachers.

A/r/tography provided a theoretical basis for my return to drawing. Within this process I became more
attuned to my interdisciplinary roles as teacher, researcher, and artist. I was able to reconnect with, while
reconceptualizing my role as artist. Moreover, I was able to dwell on my discomfort with the contiguous
relationship between the identities of teacher and researcher. Drawing as a practice was of value to my
foci in this study.

While living inquiry within a collaborative action research group was viewed as having practical value for
the other study participants, contemporary art and a/r/tography were deemed inconsequential to the
realities of their art teaching. As researchers it was complex enough for these teachers to inquire into their
own teaching. To take on another role as artist for Susan and Deirdre was a commitment that they
predicted would not yield the type of practical insights they were looking for. Even Richard’s burgeoning
artistic practice was kept separate from his teaching. It was a leisure activity that he chose to pursue,
while Susan and Deirdre did not have the desire or time to take this on. This is understandable within the
constraints of their busy personal and professional lives. In this, they are not unlike many other teachers.

For the teachers contemporary art was also considered a commitment that would demand a lot from them
while generating few benefits. My unsolicited sharing of contemporary artworks did not inspire the
teachers to learn more. It was only when Susan asked me about artists that morphed and when Deirdre
serendipitously happened upon the book Why Paint Cats that they incorporated contemporary art into
their drawing units. Contemporary art was embraced if it could be directly integrated into their teaching,
on their own terms. Again, this is not uncommon in art teaching. As Atkinson (2006) shows in a recent
research project by Downing and Watson (2004), the majority of secondary art teachers in England also
focus on early twentieth century European art works instead of contemporary movements.

This focus on early twentieth century art mirrors the local teachers’ previous exposure and current
preoccupation within the study. Similarly, my own drawing had stagnated into a period of pre-modern
priorities of pictorial realism. But what I realized through my own artistic exploration is that I had a
multi-faceted knowledge base to jump from and to integrate into my pre-modern paralysis. In the face of
risk, we have to start somewhere. For these teachers their points of departure were periods with which
they had some familiarity. Asking teachers to incorporate artworks into their teaching for the first time
and then requiring them to integrate works from movements that are unfamiliar was a step too far for

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these teachers. While with my assistance Susan was able to use the works of Frank Gehry in her teaching, she was just beginning to connect her teaching with her extensive knowledge of Canadian art. Deirdre was starting to build off an artist’s work from the mid twentieth century. Richard was relying on modernism for his own painting and his classroom units. In order to create curriculum, in order to recreate artistic practice, we needed to start with the familiar and to revisit what they felt had been lacking in their own art education – the learning of the conventions of pictorial realism. In a sense, we had to start from where we left off in our own learning, when we put away our sketchbooks, when drawing became meaningless or too difficult, when we became convinced of our lack. We have to revisit those places, make links through and within those gaps, in order to see and create anew. I am not convinced that an art education that bypasses these emotions, practices, contexts, gaps, and understandings can instill a confidence in teachers that in art they might positively impact the students they teach. Without their connecting to their pasts and building on their own continual coming to know drawing, they might have remained teachers of art in perpetual discouragement. This becomes particularly important as art education becomes visual culture education and studio practice may be by-passed in favour of conceptual learning.

I have rarely asked teachers or students of education what they want to learn and built my art education curricula around these needs. I assume they want the newest and current best practices from the field of art education. Accordingly, I load up my syllabus with this “expert” knowledge. I assume a lot as I did while working with these teachers. In my assumptions I am not unlike many other art educators working with non-art specialist teachers who teach their own art (Duncum, 1999b). If we have and/or take the time to let adults voice their needs and assist them in their own chosen paths of change, art educators may be taken aback by the priorities of these adults. Taken back to “an old wound” (P. London, personal communication, October 23, 2004), a gap, a lack, an opening that might be the root of discouragement, while concurrently revealing emerging routes toward transformation. Not unlike research that I have conducted on participants, I realize I am still struggling with not imposing my teaching as a temporary band-aid over these gaps and wounds. In this research I have not only guided, but also been guided through the contours of the roots and routes of possible change for these teachers and myself.

These teachers approach the teaching of drawing with enthusiasm, curiosity, and openness. They are learners alongside their students. They feel less paralyzed by past experiences (or gaps) and limited views of drawing. Through this inquiry it has also become apparent that when teachers delve into the roots of their discouragement they are sensitized to the drawing discouragement of their students and have more of a repertoire for possible routes out of this discouragement for their students. The spirit of
experimentation and collegial support within the action research group spurred them on to push themselves and each other in ways they had not imagined. Their research experiences have resulted in a newfound and ongoing commitment to teaching art and drawing that is reasonable and risky, practical and responsive to the evolving contexts of their teaching. This seems a worthwhile goal, a “sensible” (re)starting point for non-art specialist teachers at the beginning of their careers and for those in the midst of their profession.

7.6 Parting Shot

Richard: I have been “Nadined”. (meeting 11)

There it was again. Unlike the earlier “disciple” comment, by the time I heard this statement near the end of the study, it did not fill me with the same anxiety as I had experienced in the summer. I understood my role and the nature of this comment differently. I had facilitated the participants becoming more of what they wanted to be, aiding them on their own journeys of self-discovery, and assisting them in finding their own potential. All the while coming to a deeper sense of what and why they wanted to change in the ways they were undertaking. I too had been “Richarded,” “Susaned,” and “Deirdred” just as they might have been “Nadined.”

I pushed Richard on this comment later at our last interview to see just how much he thought I was in charge of the process.

Nadine: What if I gave you a two-day pro d day of just me? What would it ideally be? Just me giving you my authoritarian voice. That would be desirous?

Richard: It would be interesting.

Nadine: I think it sort of shuts down…if I just gave you tricks it might shut down possibilities.

Richard: Unless you asked us to bring things in like this book – what we have a passion for – and we could have a discussion around what we could do.
Nadine: I think if I gave you “Nadine’s Manual” and you walked away with the tricks, I don’t know if it would make these deeper changes or open you up to thinking in a different way.

Richard: I think the key is to walk away with a manual that we deconstruct and that we talk about in every direction conceivable and then we go to our classes and bring back our projects to talk about. That is different than “Here is a book to buy.” The deconstructing and the conversations....I mean deconstructing in an open-ended way. (2nd interview)

I could not agree more.
CHAPTER 8  LINKING TO OTHER, ONGOING CONVERSATIONS

The sharing of our research inquiries connects to a variety of ongoing conversations outside of our collaborative group. Throughout the dissertation issues are addressed that generate insights related to non-art specialist teachers, their preparation as teachers, professional development in art, and post-modern, visual cultural approaches to art education. Furthermore, the inquiries’ methodological bases generate understandings that extend current research and articulations of action research and a/r/tography.

8.1 Non-Art Specialists’ Perspectives

This study will be of relevance to other tertiary educators and researchers who embrace inquiries into the education and/or development of non-art specialist teachers of art. The experiences of these three teachers inform the field of art education on their processes of change and coming to understand. Since this group of teachers compromises 45% of elementary educators of art in the United States (statistics cited from National Center for Educational Statistics, Arts Education in Public Elementary and Secondary Schools: 1999-2000 by Day, 2007) and the overwhelming majority of elementary educators of art across Canada, the articulation of their evolving perspectives is of crucial importance to the field of art education. While we have heard from the preservice perspective (see Grauer, 1995, 1998; Hudson & Hudson, 2007), along with the beginning non-art specialist teachers’ perspectives (see McCoubrey, 2000), we rarely hear from seasoned non-art specialist teachers who teach their own art (see Ashton, 1999; Patteson, 2004). Furthermore, this study adds to the growing number of studies that focus on the roles of art making and collegial groups to enable change over time (Ashton, 1999; Patteson, 2004).

Through our inquiry I acquired an understanding of how these teachers negotiated paths of change that were attuned to the needs of their students and to the teachers’ own capacities of risk within the constraints of time, expectations of assessment, as well as institutional and community norms.

Researchers need to learn from what these teachers consider realistic within the restrictions of their occupational contexts. I found myself learning from how they amended current practices, traversed institutional confines, and connected their new understandings with knowledge gained in teaching other subjects. These experiences will inform the ongoing debate around priorities in tertiary art education for non-art specialist teachers of art.
8.2 Perspectives on Drawing

Time and again the non-art specialist teacher identifies the inability to draw (Ashton, 1999; Duncum, 1999b; McCoubrey, 2000; Smith-Shank, 1992, 1993) as the key factor to their self-proclaimed outsider status related to art. This dissertation examines the roots of this belief, how this paralysis can lessen, and foster different ways of understanding drawing and art in teaching. These findings correspond to Ashton’s (1999) recommendation that teacher education art courses need to pay greater attention to deconstructing the grip of pictorial realism in art and drawing while explicitly teaching these conventions. Therefore, this study contributes understandings of how the perceptions of non-art specialist teachers can undergo transformation and positively impact on their teaching of art. Consequently, this dissertation should inform future professional development initiatives, as well as preservice teacher education.

8.3 Preservice Teacher Education

This study points to the inadequacies of preservice teacher education in the visual arts and provides insights into how to prepare preservice teachers to teach art at the elementary level. In this I concur with Hudson and Hudson’s (2007) conclusion that “preservice teachers need to be equipped with a repertoire of effective teaching strategies for enacting art education” (p. 4). They need experiences with the creation and interpretation of art along with an understanding of the language of art and the roots of their perceptions of art education. This requires adequate time. None of the studies concerning programs that enabled non-art specialist art teachers’ transformation in visual art (see Patteson, 2004), including this inquiry, were short-term in nature.

8.4 Professional Development

This dissertation traces these teachers’ beliefs back to early educational experiences and then tracks how they change over time. These are two important areas of insight. Without concerted effort and/or intervention, these non-art specialist teachers who teach their own art can fiercely maintain their values and perceptions of art teaching and learning over decades. But with the confrontation of these beliefs, even seasoned teachers can develop a deeper understanding of learning and teaching in art. This study makes evident that an understanding and appreciation of the idiosyncratic and autobiographical nature of teaching, researching, and creating is essential when undertaking initiatives to provide support to teachers.

Post-modern and visual cultural priorities in art education have to be mindful of the conditions within
which these teachers work (Duncum, 1999b). This study shares how seasoned teachers make sense of their learning in art and translate this into their classroom practices, thereby shedding light on what has been termed the "black hole" of art education (Duncum, 1999b, p. 33), that is how elementary generalists develop within the constraints of their training and institutional limitations. I worked with their willingness, contexts, priorities, and tolerances for risk. I also articulate how they integrate art across school subjects as well as unforeseen connections between art and other content areas that could be capitalized on in future professional development initiatives.

### 8.5 Conversational Community

This study indicates the potential of collaborative inquiry to have an impact on the reform of art education in elementary schooling. There is an expanding body of research highlighting the importance of collaboration among teachers of art in professional development (see Irwin, Crawford, Mastri, Aileen, Robertson, & Stephenson, 1997; Irwin, Mastri, & Robertson, 2000; Lind, 2007; Patteson, 2004). While this study complements these inquiries in its support of collegial research groups for practicing teachers of art, it also reports on the relational conditions of understanding through conversation and co-mentoring. Additionally, the classroom focus of the teachers’ individual action research projects permitted the teachers a praxis space to reflect critically on their practices, question their beliefs about teaching and learning related to drawing, and use teachers’ own drawing practices to bring new insights into their teaching.

### 8.6 “Action Turn”

Candace Jesse Stout’s 2006 editorial appeal for an action turn and more “knowledgeable action” (p. 195) in the midst of a movement into the paradigm of visual culture urges the field of art education to give action research the respect it deserves. While action research is embraced in many post-secondary and graduate art education programs, as Stout’s (2006) call recognizes, classroom and/or teacher action research rarely find their way into journals such as Studies in Art Education. This dissertation’s inquiry into the forging of links between current, past, and present art education knowledge within the contexts of specific classrooms and a collaborative teacher research group is a reply to this appeal.
8.7 Revealing Ourselves

Any steps toward improvement and transformation must be open to reconsideration in the face of what these teachers view as possible and worthwhile within their current institutional, cultural, and historical contexts. This reconsideration involves researchers critically examining the basis of their beliefs and values. How do they bend and transform alongside these contexts and renegotiations? I model for others who dare to cooperate with teachers how abstract theory and pedagogical imperatives undergo alteration within the praxis space of a collaborative action research group, where the researcher initiating the project becomes one among equals.

It is all but impossible to approach a topic, a population, or an inquiry with a blank slate. As the teachers and I entered the study claiming open-mindedness, we soon revealed our biases and preconceptions of drawing. At the onset I assumed the teacher-participants in this study would yield to my lead, without the conscious self-recognition of my own priorities. The teacher-participants did not need a leader as much as a collaborator that would accompany them on their chosen paths. They would challenge themselves and each of us in ways that were reasonable, risky, surprising, and unpredictable.

In this, teachers who enter research should find my narratives of self-examination of value. We cannot forget or easily reject our identities as teachers within research. When working with groups that have less knowledge of art and who look to us for guidance, art educators in the role of researcher within collaborative inquiry have the opportunity to investigate their beliefs and expand their understandings of learning, teaching, and researching.

8.8 Postrepresentational Research Writing

If another recent call for postrepresentational perspectives in writing and researching by Stout (2007) is any indication the field of art education is also opening up to self-conscious texts of inquiry that at once suggest, while reflecting. It is time for a postrepresentational turn in art education research and writing. As Stout (2007) conveys,

Rather than imposing oneself upon the reader - my airtight interpretation, a representation of how things are – the researcher/writer moves alongside the reader. There...s/he “gestures” to the text, trusting that the narratives, metaphors, conversations, layered texts – those images will cultivate a space, a “field,”...where writer and reader might come together with unassuming natures to create new meanings on new grounds of
reciprocity. Text as collaboration we can call it, where, predisposed for receptivity, researcher and reader sensibilities engage. (italics from original, p. 228)

Eschewing representation opens writing to the nonlinear, messy, and generative while inviting the reader into “ever proliferating conversation attentive to the nature and possibilities of the worlds within our texts” (Stout, 2007, p. 229). My open-ended, intertextual, and self-conscious writing echoes and responds to this call and also acts as a provocation for others to join in the ongoing conversation.

8.9 “Seeing” Beyond

This dissertation engages with the complex and relational conditions for inquiry and change. Complexity thinking, relational inquiry, a/r/tography, and action research as a living practice has facilitated my “seeing” beyond the obvious and current limits to the not-yet-seen (Springgay, Irwin, & Wilson Kind, 2005). A/r/tographic inquiry allowed for the generation of further questions throughout the study including the interrogation of my own interdisciplinary roles. The turning of the research tables toward my own coming to know drawing and artistic practices allowed for the tracking, unsettling, and transformation of my identity and knowledge of drawing, teaching, and researching. While I did not foresee my own path of change or how difficult the journey would be, a/r/tography invited me to delve deeply into my resistances and provided ways for me (along with the processes and questions of the research study) to evolve. Moreover, this study investigates the resisting, experimenting, and embracing of certain art making practices by each participant and how these overlap and/or contrast among one another. It adds to the research conducted by collaborative groups of a/r/tographers (see Irwin, Beer, Springgay, Grauer, Xiong, & Bickel, 2006), but this piece is articulated from the perspective of a lone a/r/tographer in the midst of a cooperative action research group consisting of teacher-researchers who were resistant to undertaking a/r/tography. It also is written predominantly from the evolving identity of teacher, a teacher/researcher (re)exploring drawing as an artistic practice, teacher/researchers investigating drawing practices for instructional purposes, and finally, Richard was pursuing his identity as artist, separate from, but nonetheless, related to his teaching.
CHAPTER 9  ENSUING PROPOSITIONS

When we subordinate teaching to learning, it follows that the processes of engagement in research and teaching should be attended to perhaps more than the outcomes of that engagement. Pulling from our experiences within the research group, the role and value of complexity and relational knowing in transforming curriculum, questioning interpretation, contextualizing perspectives, and enabling emergent change has been revealed. The ensuing propositions subsequently speak to the processes of teacher professional development, art education, and educational research.

9.1 Professional Development

This dissertation emphasizes the importance of teacher directed professional development opportunities. The majority of staff development programs “focus on importing external innovations or correcting ‘teacher deficits’ rather than celebrating the potential of teachers to define their own learning and create their own meanings” (May, 1995, p. 83). I call on others to assume a more holistic view of professional development that seeks to study the intertwining of professional identities and practices with personal, historical, social, and contextual influences on lived experiences. Within a conversational community a forum for the creation of curriculum and development directed by teachers’ goals and inquiries (May, 1995) is permitted. In this I echo the advice of Irwin (2003):

[A]s groups of teachers join in collaborative communities to imagine possible changes to their current programs, they would be attuned to the qualities of their experiences, perceptions and ideas. They would work with one another through an affirmative engagement, trusting in the process and the expertise of their colleagues. They would surrender to searching for ideas rather than defensively maintaining tradition. (p. 71)

This community of teachers and researchers might lessen the professional and intellectual isolation many educators feel. The facilitators of such opportunities need to demonstrate openness to learning from the unpredictability and nonlinearity of change. Further research is needed to determine the long-term effects of participation in these sorts of collaborative inquiries and the impact on student learning once a professional development program officially ends. I hope to re-visit the teacher-researchers in this study to investigate their views and practices at some point in the future.
9.2  Drawing Outsiders In

We can do much more to support elementary non-art specialist teachers of art. Researchers need to involve this group in activities that develop their broader awareness of art education issues and foster an attunement to teaching as living inquiry. Professional development for this population should consider their expertise in other areas of the elementary curriculum as a basis for their reconsideration of art teaching.

Art educators must recognize that art and drawing in schooling can establish debilitating and enduring self-perceptions in students that effectively create a population that not only feel unable to draw, but also feel unable to participate in art making or art discourses. These self-confessed outsiders need to revisit the roots of their discouragement with the assistance of sensitive, yet critical Others who can accompany them on their self-chosen paths to altered relationships with art and drawing. The perspectives of this population can offer teacher educators and researchers valuable perspectives that can confront assumptions about how understanding is enabled in art education.

Teachers need occasions to imagine, act, and reflect on other possibilities in their teaching in order to deconstruct the notion that curriculum is a text or object external to them.

All teachers deserve to feel creative, cherished, competent, and empowered to co-construct their curricula in the tapestry of their lives and work. Our challenge is to create opportunities for more meaningful forms of curriculum development than a written curriculum. We need to better understand those curricular texts we create, mediate, and embody in our classrooms, language, and experience. Like any text or work of art, these texts are open to interpretation and rich with possibilities for all who can see and feel.

(May, 1995, p. 83)

In working with teachers, researchers are obliged to concede their knowledge as partial, contested, and value-laden (Huebner, 1996), contextualized within historical and social confines. This opening allows for knowledge generation in relation and for conceptions, practices, and the teaching of drawing to evolve within specific contexts and in response to the unfolding insights of Others.

I now think it is imperative, especially with individuals that have been socialized to perceive drawing in particular ways, that art educators and researchers acknowledge and dwell on these paradigms instead of bypassing them with a focus on other perspectives. The teachers in this study knew what they needed and were brave enough to commit to inquiring into their own drawing discouragement. Exploring the basis of
teachers' conceptions of students' learning in art and how this relates to their previous experiences, can move these teachers toward an understanding of the basis of their own objectives in teaching art to youth.

Reconnecting with and increasing comfort levels in the teacher-participants' artistic processes seems to be vital to the demystification of art making and the changing of perceptions. I concur with Ashton (1999) that teacher education art courses need to pay greater attention to deconstructing the grip of pictorial realism in art and drawing while explicitly teaching these conventions. The development of individual experiences in the language and processes of art are necessary for the emergence of complex possibilities in teaching (Davis, Sumara, & Luce-Kapler, 2000). To teach for the emergence of complexity, one has to be aware of some of the meaningfulness, possible nuances, and difficulties inherent in knowledge. Within a complex view of knowledge we can allow for the unanticipated to feed back into our teaching and understanding, thereby expanding the limits of what is possible in art teaching, not merely maintaining the existing possible.

While this dissertation has focused on conversations related to the learning and teaching of drawing, further conversations with teachers of art concerning their own artistic processes and how these might a/r/tographically mingle with their teaching and researching would add to an evolving and complex understanding of knowledge generation. I modeled my own a/r/tographic investigations for the teacher-participants. They, in turn, explored art toward personal and practical ends, but did not embrace a/r/tography as a methodology. Given a longer period than presented in this study it is impossible to predict what might be possible.

The teaching of art and the content of visual art curriculum need to be represented and taken up as complicated conversations (Irwin & Chalmers, 2007; Pinar, 2004) wherein a diversity of rationales for art education can be maintained, expanded, and rewritten through dialogue and practice. Specifically, I view drawing's place within post-modern, visual culture approaches to art education as unstable. As a process, construct, product, and pastime it is charged with complexity, legacy, and pedagogical inter-actions. Drawing is imbued with meaning, always immersed in context, and points to issues within art education that are both historic and contemporary. It is therefore worthy of further inquiry.

9.3 Researchers Re-Searching

Researchers have much to learn through collaboratively inquiring with teachers. Not only can they gain understandings related to schools and teachers, but through being and becoming in relation, researchers
are provided with opportunities to reconfigure their own taken-for-granted views concerning research and teaching. Complexity thinking, relational inquiry, a/r/tography, and action research as a living practice has facilitated my “seeing” beyond the obvious and current limits to the not-yet-seen. May (1995) maintains that in collaborative conversations

    we can witness and testify to the heretofore invisible and unspeakable. Rather than recoil from the complexity and ambiguity in our work, we should celebrate the fact that we do not have art curriculum/teaching nailed down once and for all — and never will. (p. 83)

Additionally, researchers, along with teachers, need to be students of their practices, values, and histories. An understanding and appreciation of the idiosyncratic and autobiographical nature of teaching, researching, and creating is essential when undertaking initiatives to provide support to teachers.

Out of context of this research group and our relational learning I cannot prescribe a new master narrative for teacher education, professional development, or drawing within art education. I might recommend that any program that aspires to change practices and perceptions needs to approach educators respectfully and invite them into spaces where they have a hand in co-creating the pedagogy of their own change. Relying on the promotion of personal and communal conversations around teacher-initiated issues and values may hold the potential for individual teachers to commit to their own transformational paths. A faithfulness to inquiry that is personal, relational, theoretical, and practical engages teaching as lived research. The facilitator within this structure would need to establish trust among the group while challenging and supporting both the teacher-participants and his or her own understandings.
CHAPTER 10 DRAWING A BROKEN BOTTOM LINE

Then the end. Simultaneously ambition and disillusion.  
(Berger, 2005/1960, p. 9)

In drawing we act with others, with our histories, our social context, objects, and experiences (real and imagined). Drawing is a construct nested in social and historical processes (Atkinson, 2002). We perceive, interpret, and create drawings according and/or in opposition to social norms (Riley, 2002). We mediate our creations through materials, techniques, and processes (Adams, Baynes, & Guild of St. George, 2005). Drawing intensifies experience by engaging us in representing, interpreting, mapping, remembering, empathizing, contemplating, narrating, imagining, inventing, investigating, and collaborating (Adams, Baynes, & Guild of St. George, 2006) across contexts. To draw is to perform a chorus of influences, histories, priorities, and experiences. The teaching of drawing reiterates these forces in our curricular choices and pedagogic practices. To surface these elements into consciousness is to inquire into how we come to understand drawing.

When these processes come into relation with other ways of interpreting, creating, and constructing, we have opportunities to see with different lenses that which we thought we knew and that which we have not known before. To surrender to the risk of becoming in the face of the unknown is to concede the partiality of our understandings. Together our voices and marks can overlap, extend, and transform that which is possible on our own. As I have tracked our turns and becoming in relation, I have shared my own learning and unlearning while continually attempting to enable an action research project. I have come to know drawing as a practice perforated with personal values, historical underpinnings, relations of power, and possibility. The tensions between past influences, conceptualizations of drawing in elementary schooling, current directives from the field of art education, and priorities originating in contemporary art have situated drawing within a complex web or shifting relations and competing discourses.

This dissertation articulated our processes as an unfolding, complex, and ongoing conversation about learning and teaching related to drawing. Placing teachers at the centre of their own learning in a critically reflective and social context contributed to the transformation of perception, practice, and curricular possibility. Not one of us was obliged to change, but we were nonetheless presented with a compelling opportunity to learn with friends.
As an open system we maintained relationships across change while resisting reduction. We were mutually pulled into inquiry and transformation by our difficulties and confusions. It was through a re-framing and demystification of our inter-relationships with pictorial realism in drawing that we were able to renegotiate previous encounters that had caused stagnation in our own education and become opened up to new ways of understanding drawing. Through our commitment to sustain an ongoing dialogue we were jarred into recognizing our perceptual habits, moved beyond comfortable patterns, and surrendered to a greater attunement toward drawing, teaching, learning, and researching. We had our own frustrations and concentrations that, while separate, constantly interacted with our own coming to know. We did not come together in the end, but retained our own priorities and insights that were, at once, enabled and enlarged by our experiences in relation. Although we cannot predict when and how transformation will happen or the end results, I feel that it is my ethical responsibility to interact with others as though the possibility always exists for transformative experience.

How we came to generate knowledge and understanding around drawing is not a story of finding universal and certain solutions to be applied across contexts. I therefore do not have the answers or propose clear directions forward out of this messy space that the teaching of drawing occupies. I have shared how a group of teachers and I dwelled together on drawing over a number of months. How we shared our thinking, questioning, and coming to know drawing in unfamiliar ways.

The processes of this study helped me to reconsider my participation in researching and teaching. Because of the complexity of the undertaking, I have come some way in problematizing remnants of structuralist and rationalist paradigms that surfaced in me during the research. I began to realize that this project was based upon a set of competing assumptions, some so ingrained that I had not made them explicit to myself at the start of the research and others so flawed that I wanted to reject them. I can now admit, despite the messiness of this action research and the unsettling nature of this complex and a/r/tographic inquiry, I would now have trouble conducting research on participants, though I would be content researching with others in a community of conversation. I have also taken up reciprocity as I have moved from studying others from the outside looking in towards turning the same scrutiny onto myself (Tillmann-Healy, 2003). In this I have been writing, drawing, researching, and teaching my way through my points of discomfort. In living the experience of doing research, I have felt the need to re-present and reside in my story to move toward liberation from and transformation of my own limitations (Ellis, 2007).

I could have written this as a relatively linear piece omitting the problems, tidying up the falters, and championing only the ways we found to change. But that would have, in part, been at variance with the
experience of the research. This study did not follow rigid or linear models that lack the flexibility to recognize moving situations within which surprise and confusion may contain the next step forward. Instead of collapsing our study into my single, authorial voice, I have tried to reveal shifting perspectives, multiple voices, and porous boundaries. By interweaving pictures and texts in this paper, I have attempted to re-present the complex and contingent processes that occurred as we are perceiving, interpreting, making meaning, and expressing our understandings of experience. While this may have presented a less smooth reading, it nonetheless revealed the evocative character of collaborative action.

I arrive at an ongoing end that again reminds me of drawing. The processes of drawing can expose the layers of its own making. There is a transparency and polyvocality of colours, lines, shapes, smudges, paper, relationships that are heard and read within a drawing. The voices of participants from the research group are relayed, erased, reconfigured, made visible, re-presented through my mediation. I have chosen what to highlight, recognize, ignore, and/or layer. Also as in drawing, my initial perspectives can be traced throughout this writing, as can my changing views and unforeseen outcomes. Through continued questioning and ongoing coming to awareness I have consciously undertaken and re-presented my overlapping identities in this writing, drawing, researching. Drawing processes can be partially revealed in an unfinished product. The “unfinishedness” of drawing leaves it open to the prospects of continual evolution and interpretive possibilities. Similarly, there are still elusive questions to be asked concerning change, curriculum, and drawing. In the end I draw a broken bottom line that permits for “possibilities in waiting,” for continued insights, and ongoing conversations with others around how we come to understand drawing.

10.1 Possibilities in Waiting

Richard: It is a possibility in waiting. (1st interview)

Susan: I think this is totally different than any other pro d. I have done more coursework than others. I have an MBA and a MEd in administration. Lots of coursework. This is totally different. It was more about “Let’s try this today and if not tomorrow, let’s think about this for the future.” (2nd interview)

Our research group and the teachers’ own research provided numerous starting points that were taken up in a number of trajectories decided by the teachers and supported by me. Some of these paths remained “potential trajectories” (Davis, Sumara, & Luce-Kapler, 2000, p. 97) that were not chosen, started, or
followed through on within the confines of our study period. As Davis, Sumara, and Luce-Kapler (2000) articulate in the following quotation:

We can imagine a new epistemology in which the path not taken, the event that did not happen, concepts not met, remain as future rhizomatic connections. We should celebrate the differences (both contents and depth) between a projected strategy and the actual work done, basing ourselves on emerging conceptions and the direction of discussions.

(p. 97)

By meeting 9, the topic of what it would be like when the study was over crept into our discussions and kept creeping.

Richard: Because we are here in a collaborative group we help each other with ideas. What occurred to me...we start to reflect on what is happening in our classes even though we are not together. We will be doing some planning and maybe we will think about a reading or discussion or something that came up and maybe a colour, a shading, a material, and we will incorporate that in your art lesson. I think that is what is going to happen when we are done here.

Nadine: I think that is already happening. (meeting 9)

Susan: ...continue growing? That is the question.

Nadine: You are not going to continue growing?

Susan: I will, but maybe not at the same rate.

Nadine: It will always be with you and your mindset is more open. You can’t go back.

Susan: You’ve been the stimulus and the catalyst for change. That being said, I have grown 15-20%. But without that catalyst there, I don’t know if it will continue at the same rate. (2nd interview)

As the researcher, I was looking forward to the end of “data collection,” the end of interviewing, the end of observing, and the end of worrying where we were going. But I have yet to reach an end. We continue to draw. I am still a resource and a sounding board. Drawing projects have extended ideas that percolated during our official research period. The teachers share their surprises, delights, accomplishments, and
trials. I wonder what, if anything, made it onto the walls for the parent teacher night. I wish I had the time to act as a critical friend to Richard in his art making for years to come and even create alongside him, perhaps inviting others to join us. I am updated about materials and consulted on purchasing orders. As a friend I cannot let it end. The mutual support continues as we carry on risking the unknown.
REFERENCES


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