A HAND IN THE ACTION:
AN ARTS-BASED INQUIRY OF METAPHOR AND
MEANING MAKING AS TOOLS FOR INSPIRING
TRANSFORMATION

By

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Abstract

This arts-based action research documents the living inquiry of one learner/educator as she strives to make sense of her own and her learner/participants' learning journeys. Using art and metaphor as tools for self-reflection, learners engaged with personal challenges in an effort to transform understandings of our personal ideologies so that we might live more consistently with them.

The artist/researcher/teacher worked with a grade 6/7 class in an urban Canadian centre over a period of six weeks to develop puppetry as a tool to inquire into personal challenges. The use of puppets around the world and throughout time to captivate the imagination, create spectacle, speak truth to power, inspire therapeutic communication and reflective engagement, and reflect the human condition made it an intriguing medium for individuals to explore and expand their ways of being in the world.

The learner/educator’s struggles to develop relevant arts-based curriculum and to democratic learning practices reflected students’ struggles to both understand their challenges in new ways and to make sense of arts-based inquiry. The challenges faced pointed to a problem-solution conception of learning in which the end result is predetermined. By reconceiving of the challenges as journeys, the new metaphor creates entrances into new understandings.
# Table of Contents

Abstract ......................................................................................................................... ii  
Table of Contents ........................................................................................................... iii  
List of Illustrations ......................................................................................................... iv  
Preface ............................................................................................................................ v  
   Key ............................................................................................................................. v  
Acknowledgements ......................................................................................................... vii  
Dedications ...................................................................................................................... viii  
I Embarking ...................................................................................................................... 1  
   Puppetry ....................................................................................................................... 5  
II Finding a Frame .......................................................................................................... 15  
   Relevancy .................................................................................................................. 15  
   Inquiry ......................................................................................................................... 21  
   Arts-based action research ....................................................................................... 26  
III Stepping Through ..................................................................................................... 30  
   The research site ....................................................................................................... 30  
   Data collection overview ......................................................................................... 31  
   The inquiry practice ................................................................................................. 31  
   Methods of data collection ...................................................................................... 42  
   Methods of data analysis ......................................................................................... 45  
IV Facing the Journey .................................................................................................... 53  
   Artful Inquiry ............................................................................................................ 53  
   Using metaphors in teaching and learning ............................................................. 56  
   The goal setting approach ....................................................................................... 65  
   Students’ challenges ................................................................................................. 68  
   Student analysis of challenges .............................................................................. 71  
   Creation of puppets ................................................................................................. 74  
   Description of puppet metaphors .......................................................................... 77  
   Preparing for presentations .................................................................................... 80  
   Presenting .................................................................................................................. 84  
   Feedback on presentations ...................................................................................... 99  
   Student reflections ................................................................................................... 106  
Pause ............................................................................................................................... 110  
V Seeking Meaning ........................................................................................................ 111  
   Beyond the binary ................................................................................................... 112  
   Living inquiry .......................................................................................................... 118  
   Meaning making and metaphor ............................................................................ 126  
VI Embracing Growth ................................................................................................... 135  
VII The Story of the Puppet Tree: A Learning Journey .................................................. 145  
References ..................................................................................................................... 162  
Appendices ..................................................................................................................... 166
List of Illustrations

Illustration 4.1 Samples from Zach responses: Tree metaphors ........................................61-62
   4.1a Rose.............................................................................................................61
   4.1b Emily...........................................................................................................61
   4.1c Nick.............................................................................................................62
   4.1d Lee...............................................................................................................62
   4.1e Juan.............................................................................................................62
Illustration 4.2 Samantha’s alien puppet .................................................................78
Illustration 4.3 Mark’s shooting star puppet ............................................................78
Illustration 4.4 Nick’s two-headed boy puppet .......................................................78
Illustration 4.5 Drawing for Rose’s horse with blinders ........................................78
Illustration 4.6 Susan’s bear puppet .......................................................................79
Illustration 4.7 Robert’s monkey puppet ................................................................85
Illustration 4.8 Devon’s puppy puppet ....................................................................86
Illustration 4.9 Mackenzie’s prisoner puppet .........................................................87
Illustration 4.10 Dave’s puppet head .....................................................................88
Illustration 4.11 June’s puppet drawing .................................................................89
Illustration 4.12 June’s puppet ..............................................................................90
Illustration 4.13 Ryan’s two-headed puppet ...........................................................91
Illustration 4.14 Betsy’s horse puppet ...................................................................93
Illustration 4.15 Betty’s bunny puppet ....................................................................94
Preface

In my fourth year as an American middle school art teacher, I began an extracurricular club called Global Youth Allies, in which grade seven and eight students and I researched youth activism. Through the stories of youth activists told in Global Uprising: Confronting the Tyrannies of the 21st Century: Stories from a New Generation of Activists (Welton & Wolf, 2001) we learned about sweatshops and child labour, made personal connections to the lives of strangers, and considered individuals' responsibilities and avenues for promoting justice. This program was designed to introduce students to issues surrounding globalization, celebrate the work of youth activists around the world, make connections to social issues on a personal level, and explore ways to take action. We had intended to ultimately issue awards to youth activists in order to honour their commitment and experiences. Due to time constraints of the school year, however, we were unable to do more than skim the surface of labour issues and were unable to solicit nominations for the awards. I felt students were left with the weight of knowledge upon which they did not feel able to act.

Although we did not have time to deeply investigate, respond to, or take action against labour abuse and other injustices, this teaching and learning experience motivated me to explore avenues for heightening social awareness and personal agency through art education. I felt and continue to feel a great need for educational systems to confront injustice and to prepare students to think about and respond critically to social issues and conflict. While the Instructional Resource Packages (IRPs) of British Columbia's educational system are guided by progressive principles such as social responsibility, the school system in which I had taught has had no such mandate. Instead, as the U.S. educational system continues to grow more standards-based under Public Law No. 107-110 (No Child Left Behind), learning that addresses the social, physical, and spiritual needs of individuals and communities is increasingly neglected. I entered the Masters program in Curriculum Studies at the University of British Columbia driven to further investigate the possibilities of education for social justice, specifically within art education. In researching artist/educators who use art to respond to social issues surrounding globalization, I grew increasingly interested in the ways in which art educators approach the questioning of social and cultural realities. This curiosity led me to inquire into my own practices as a facilitator of learning as well as into the nature of learning and the role of democratic practices within the education of social activism.

Key

This work is an a/r/tographic text. It is composed of narrative; analytical; and self-reflective text, as well as photographs; charts; and drawings. The drawn images embedded in the text are not simply illustrative of the text, but rather a text of their own, as well as inextricably tied to the larger text. The words can be read without the images and the images can be read without the words, but the aggregate work is somehow greater.
or different than the sum of the two parts. The images are in themselves essential data of this research. They created meaning and direction when sense was eluding me.

The creation of the illustrated Puppetree story was, essentially, a coping mechanism to take me through the struggles of this research process. The images were quick pencil sketches, not originally intended to be a part of the thesis, but they made themselves indispensable as I allowed myself to play and explore their changing significance within various moments of the written text. The words and images resonated together, recalling a traditional Jewish art form called micrography, in which biblical texts from the Torah, scripted in tiny Hebrew lettering, are sculpted into drawn images that bring the written text to life. The images, I decided, were an integral part of the text. Suddenly, I felt, the text was transformed, and it too was coming to life.

The drawings have been arranged to tell a narrative, and like any allegory, the viewer brings his or her experiences to create meaning. As well, each image is situated in a significant moment of written text describing my learning experience, the interface of which allows for new understandings and interpretations to emerge. At times the text exposes memories of the experiences that shaped me within the research. These reflections are set apart by single-spaced, italic writing, and at times interrupt the text of what would traditionally be seen as the research. As the writing begins to address the data, the images become embedded directly into the body of the research. Often, to ensure that the image contributes equal weight to the meaning of the overall text, I have split the body of the text and sculpted it around the images. However, when I have located the image within the textual data, as opposed to within the reflections leading up to the research experience, I have lightened the image to give it slightly less impact.
Acknowledgements

Without the continuous and unconditional support of many people this work would never have been completed. In fact, without them I may have left the educational field all together. For their insight and loving guidance I am eternally grateful. A special thank you to Jenny Peterson, whose listening helped me find the confidence to share the story of the Puppet Tree by hearing Her story before it had words, and to Kathy Brunetta who encouraged me to give the story voice when I felt I was losing my own.

I was blessed to work with three committed, critical, and compassionate committee members throughout this learning process. My advisor, Graeme Chalmers, has gently guided me through every step of this process. Were it not for his powerful stand for social justice through arts education I would not be in Vancouver or at the University of British Columbia. I have also been lucky to work with Rita Irwin, a fearless pioneer in a/r/tography. She has been a genuine person and a shoulder to cry upon throughout my entire graduate education. Gaby Minnes Brandes has been throughout my cheerleader, confidant, teacher, surrogate mother, and my friend. Her work for justice in academics and the world touches many lives. Thank you to you all. You inspire me.

I thank as well, all the participants and supporters of this research: MJ Moran who shared her students; her time; and her mentorship for a precious six weeks, all of her students who brought their creativity and compassion with them even through the difficult times, and Diane Potts; Margaret Early; and the Multiliteracies Project at the University of British Columbia who are shedding light on truly relevant education. Thank you for supporting me in my journey.
Dedications

To Mom and Dad, for sending me on my journey with love.

To Noah, as you embark on yours.
I. Embarking

Art activists around the world respond to, raise consciousness about, and take direct action against social and environmental injustice through posters and print media, sculpture, dance, music, drama, and puppetry. Today, whole theatre companies, magazines, web sites, and artist cooperatives are dedicated to impacting the public's understanding of social issues in hopes of provoking direct action against injustice. This broad field challenges the media establishment that encourages conspicuous consumption of material goods and propagates ideology without critical thought. While art educators are taking important steps toward addressing social justice and visual literacy within the curriculum (Freedman, 2003, Gude, 2004, among others), I believe we should be wary of approaches to education that present an unexamined view of social activism.

Like adults, youth can be overwhelmed by the vast array of information and points of view that must be considered and understood in order to create change. There are many issues upon which one could take action or take a position, but it often is difficult to commit to a position or even an issue to act upon. Teachers who desire students to think critically about social issues and power structures at times unwittingly create resistance to engagement by directing students to issues that the teachers see as most important, rather than encouraging students to value their own judgments, investments, and agency. Unintentionally, teachers recreate the power hierarchy they wish to denounce by believing that they possess the "right" answer, or even the right question, and that students must learn it. As adults are still working through many of the challenges youth face in treating themselves; their loved ones; their community; and the larger world with compassion; respect; and justice, we who believe in the imperative for
students to study and develop agency to positively address social issues have a responsibility to open ourselves up to students’ perspectives and experiences.

Youth are not simply students of the world; they are active participants in it. Social issues impact their communities and their families. Youth also impact their communities and families. They are immigrants, refugees, wage earners, childcare providers, sources of love and inspiration, welfare recipients, activists, survivors of disease, survivors of abuse, survivors and perpetrators of bullying. By acknowledging and providing opportunities to address the challenges and injustices of social issues manifested in youths’ personal lives, they are better equipped to take initiative and respond empathetically. An individual whose personal needs are being met and who feels heard is more capable of and receptive to listening to the stories of others and understanding her relationship to those stories. Teachers cannot possibly know all the challenges that students will face in their lifetimes; therefore, it is more important that students have opportunities to practice making choices that address the challenges they face than to obtain skills to respond to any specific social issues chosen by a teacher. As educators, we have the responsibility of cultivating life-long learning and building students’ critical thinking skills so that students are capable of making judgments for themselves without the gentle guidance or heavy-handed persuasion of a teacher. Both educators and youth must develop skills in identifying and interpreting the overabundance of messages that make decision-making and action-taking most difficult, and negotiate the complexity of social issues and personal agency. By utilizing art as a tool for communication and divergent thinking, students and teachers can explore and
express a diversity of opinions and experiences and respond to old situations with new
perspective.

This research project, while initiated through my interests in social justice and
critical pedagogy, could not simply be approached as an art activism project focusing on
the issues about which I am passionate. I desired to create curriculum that would help
students build skills to address the issues that were most pressing in their own lives
through art. I chose puppetry, a marriage of visual and performing arts, as the primary
medium to facilitate the exploration and communication of ideas. Puppetry seemed to be
an ideal medium for showing us our own subjectivity, as the puppet can create distance
between our experiences and ourselves. By hearing our stories and emotions expressed
through our puppet representation, we become spectators of our own experiences,
allowing us to laugh at ourselves and hopefully reach new understandings. I designed a
unit in puppetry to engage students and teacher/researchers in reflective inquiry into
experiences of personal growth by using art to critically examine the ways in which we
understand and live our lives. By employing both visual and performing art to help us
contemplate and commit to personal challenges, we strived to transform internal conflict.

Inquiring into a challenge through art promotes meditation on that challenge and
can activate a different type of consciousness than thinking, speaking, or writing can
provide. By performing our beliefs and knowledge we crack open academic
epistemologies, helping us think divergently and literally take action. Garoian (1999)
advocates performance art pedagogy that challenges "the socially and historically
determined assumptions of art and culture learned in school..." making
"...personal/political agency attainable for students..." (pp. 1-2). These performative
frameworks may be used to help students explore local and global social issues and to define and redefine their relationships to others through embodied experiences. At their essence is the possibility of personal and social transformation.

While one cannot expect that art alone will change the world, or even individuals, overnight, I believe that through creation of and interaction with art, individuals can become agents of transformation. In his keynote address at the 1997 National Art Education Association conference, artist/educator Willie Birch shared, "My work is rooted in the notion that art can provoke social change. I do not believe that my art—or any art—can eliminate racism, apartheid, drugs, sexism, AIDS, or nuclear war. But when experienced, art can raise the people's consciousness, which is the first step in achieving social change" (Bolin, 1999, p. 5). Arts help us raise our consciousness so that we can clarify and strengthen our personal ideologies. This puppetry unit ultimately was designed to provide a forum to publicly share personal systems of beliefs so that we might live more consistently with them, continuously reevaluate them, and maintain an ethical mindfulness.

In its final design, this project sought to engage students in creating puppets as metaphors of the self within a personal challenge of transformation. By creating and interacting with representations of the self we may distance ourselves from personal circumstances to better reflect on our own thinking. Within our personal ideologies are diverse and often conflicting messages we receive about how we should be, think, and act. This research seeks to explore the meanings we make from these messages and considers the possibility of transforming those meanings. Throughout the unit we inquired into the ways in which the processes of conceiving, creating, and manipulating
puppets can assist and be assisted by the negotiation and evolution of individuals' relationships to personal and social responsibility. I inquire:

- In what ways can art and puppetry inspire new understandings of internal conflict and expand personal possibility?
- What are the experiences of an educator/learner learning to recognize new possibilities through arts facilitation and the pursuit of ideological consistency?
- What insights do learners find through the arts- and puppet-based inquiry into possibility?
- In what ways can my teaching and learning practices manifest my emerging understandings of art and learning?

**Puppetry**

I initially was drawn to puppetry for its potential to promote action and effect change through the presentation of spectacle. Puppets compel us to stop and take notice. We marvel in their reflection of humanity. These pieces of art come to life to portray us, to chastise us, teach us, mock us, to show us what is possible and live the magic we dream. “Even [puppetry’s] literal conditions—in which a material icon or figure serves as the vehicle or mouthpiece for some absent and invisible “author”—are a virtually inevitable metaphor for the entwined process of cultural definition and appropriation” (Shershow, 1995, p. 2). Puppets themselves are, in effect, metaphors for humanity and their stories are frequently allegorical.

Due to the availability of scrap material used to make puppets, they have a long and often political history in folk art. In the 17th century, traveling puppet theatres, housing the now familiar Punch and Judy, began telling stories considered so vulgar the Church eventually forbade them (Mogg, 2000). Punch, his French manifestation, Guignol, Hanswurst in Germany, and a variety of other international characters became heroes of the common folk, mocking power and evading legal and moral order. Czech
puppeteers have had a powerful tradition of radical puppetry since the 19th century when their Czech language performances persisted through a ban on their native tongue. As government control of theatres increased, however, even the puppet voices of dissent were silenced. During the Nazi occupation, allegorical puppet performances critiquing the regime, called "Daisy Shows" for their tenacity in popping up despite repression, ultimately forced the puppeteers underground and later to concentration camps for the crime of dissent.

Wise Fool Community Arts in Berkeley, California claims that puppets are "the quintessential tricksters—court jesters without the court, able to cross boundaries of both opinion and propriety, enabling us to critique society and government with handmade beauty and wit" (¶1). This seemingly benign art form, relegated by most to children's theatre, has the power to sneak under our radar like the Trojan horse and speak the subversive words that some are afraid to say and others afraid to hear. In the 1960s Peter Schumann's Bread and Puppet Theatre began using large, spectacle-drawing puppets for political protest against the Vietnam War. These enormous puppets have been popularized in the anti-globalization movement as a means to build community, promote artistic expression and free speech, and to rally crowds.

Activists following the lead of Bread and Puppet Theatre have utilized the power of monumental puppetry to create spectacle that draws attention to injustice. Ali Star of Art and Revolution, an activist artist cooperative wrote:

The overwhelming coverage we receive suggests that even mainstream media are captivated by art with a message. Reporters often ask if puppets and performers will be at upcoming demonstrations. However, because art is so effective at reaching people, the police have increased their attacks on our puppets and props. In 1996, on the last day of our Chicago [Democratic National Convention]
counter-convention, police without nametags or numbers raided our puppet space, using pepper spray indiscriminately. (Starr, A., 2001, p. 35)

Fear of the puppets' power to rally people has manifested in a practice of police raids on political puppet workshops, including the 1999 World Trade Organization (WTO) protest in Seattle. How could a simple piece of artwork have so much power to captivate and activate as to instill such a reaction? I sought to explore this potency within an educational context.

I have also been intrigued by the power of puppetry as a tool for learning. There is a great deal of writing surrounding the use of puppetry as a medium for facilitating communication. Eisenberg et al (1994) cites the work of Mize and Ladd (1988) in explaining that, "enactive procedures for assessing young children's strategies (e.g., having children act out strategies with puppets) are more likely than verbal assessments to elicit the social scripts that guild children's actual, spontaneous behaviours rather than their reflections about strategies" (p. 213). In other words, using puppets, which are perceived by young children as living beings, helps to engage the problem-solving approaches and forms of communication that youth would exhibit during real life challenges, thus eliciting more realistic or accurate research data. The ease with which young children interact and communicate with puppets inspired early childhood educators and researchers to suggest using puppets to role-play conflict resolution and reinforce positive peer interactions (Adams & Wittmer, 2001; Eisenberg et al, 1994). Quisenberry (1975) suggests that, "Puppets appear to help the children to coordinate their own experiences with language, as well as teaching them to be an attentive audience and to overcome their egocentrism" (p. 883). By taking on the voice and persona of another,
participants empathize with others, often prompting shy youth to express themselves more easily.

Puppets have also found enthusiastic reception in therapeutic settings with children who have visual and auditory impairments and other disabilities (Renfro, 1984; Oatman, 1981; Gronna et al., 1999), have helped people “express their feelings, reenact anxiety laden events, and try new behaviors” (Carter & Mason, 1998, p. 50), and have been used to help children with emotional and behavioral disorders to create new possibilities to deal with their challenges (Caputo, 1993). Most often, teachers, therapists, and researchers, use purchased puppets to demonstrate desirable behaviors. In some studies, students gave input into the puppets’ role-plays without having the opportunity to manipulate the puppets (Adams & Wittmer, 2001). If puppets could be effective simply by being small and childlike enough for a young child to be drawn in and empathize, I wondered how interactions with puppets might impact older youth or even adults, and what role creating puppets might play in personal growth and the development of social consciousness.

Educators and researchers interested in using puppets with older children, adolescents, and adults seemed more open to the possibilities of various forms of engagement with puppetry. Teachers, librarians, and academics suggest making and manipulating puppets to help students bring literature to life (Ratliff, 1980; Sierra, 1991), scientific principles and aspects of ecosystems (Lowe and Matthew, 2000), and social issues (Chilcoat, 1996; McIntyre, 1998). Although I was inspired by the use of puppetry within education to look critically at social issues and heighten social consciousness, I found that such puppet programs were often adult initiated and adult directed. Rarely did
the students have control over the physical expression of the puppets, the puppet
presentation, or the learning outcomes. No project took into account students’ personal

I started thinking about working with puppetry simply because I was fascinated by it. My story goes like this: I had friends who worked with puppets and I was intrigued. I watched people open up to critical ideas about globalization and looked at and listened to puppets. The puppets drew people in. They made people look. They looked fun, but like the Trojan horse, you would think they would be benign and ambushed by some ideas... ideas that want to be heard. This medium for helping ideas. Then I saw Ronnie Burkett’s puppet show, Provenance, which was at the same time, provoking and magical. I knew I would have to somehow, but I had really minimal experience with puppetry (having only created a few puppets previously and then only with my middle school students) and almost no experience as a performer. To tell you the truth, I am pretty much terrified of public performance, especially when it has to do with really personal ideas, so I really could not imagine how I would help other people do this. I was open to it... but to tell you the truth, I was terrified.
to explore and honour their own stories, rather than simply studying others'. As well, I found no research pertaining to the significance of creating or manipulating puppets and therefore sought to research the possibilities created through the creation of puppets as metaphors for the self.

The focus on metaphor, significant in all art media, further extends the space between the puppet and the puppeteer, allowing individuals to view their own circumstances through a new lens. Although I often struggled to guide students through this exploration, I believed that such a process could help individuals gain new insight complexity of metaphors in relationship to personal growth would involve more than simple interpretation. Rather, I began to see that it involves a process of inquiry into the extended impact of the metaphor on conscious and unconscious aspects of life. By identifying the metaphoric frameworks within our lives, we can affect the ways in which we understand ourselves and our relationships to our families, to our classrooms and communities, and to the world.

I recognized that by neglecting learners' life experiences I was reproducing the conventional metaphoric framework in which students are perceived as empty vessels waiting to be filled with the teacher's knowledge. If we extend this metaphor we better understand the limiting implications it has for the classroom. The directionality of this paradigm presupposes that students will willingly or passively accept the knowledge that the teacher pours into them, that the student will neither react to the knowledge that has been shared nor affect change on it in any way, and that the teacher, presumably, will eventually be drained by constant giving. Despite a shift toward more progressive conceptions of education, this paradigm still infiltrates many school systems and teacher
education programs. Certainly I struggled to move to a conception of education in which I could see myself as a learner along with my students.

2. My first serious attempt to pursue puppetry as a medium for with a group of pre-service teachers. I asked them to inquire into the history of racism in art education and to come to class with a serious consideration of the issue. I asked the participants to choose an ancestor or ancestry, to investigate the history of racism in art education as it relates to the realities of art education today. I thought it important to create an environment where students could simply say that racism was such an integral part of our culture that we really need a deep investigation if we are to understand our own relationships to the perspectives represented. I asked them to write down the story of racism and embed it in our cultures that we really need a deep investigation if we are to understand our own relationships to the perspectives represented. For dissent and discussion, I asked them to explore how the person would react to what was being taught in the schools (particularly in art her in their own times or today). This a great deal of dialogue and debate as grappled with the issues of representing family members. We truly worried therectangle the "other." The inquiry felt very the feedback was overwhelmingly positive. The inquiry felt very promising about the experience, and I was proud of our work. I was energized to expand this tice.

3. The more I worked on my own puppetry, the more I thought, "How can I teach about puppetry?" I found that prior experience could be helpful in developing characters. Their importance to me was the constant fear of sharing it with others. I found the story was too contrived or work for me. I got to explore the last four years of my life as a middle school art teacher. What’s more, I got to explore the lives of my students, who I admittedly did not always see as whole people with lives outside of school. It seemed too overwhelming to get involved in all the details of 125 students' lives. So I stopped engaging with the realities of their lives early on. Now I am sorry.
I wanted my puppetry to be a story of youths’ personal lives and struggles. I wanted to be able to show what it’s like to be “other” and how all of us are at times, or at least feel that way. I wanted to show the amazing coping mechanisms we have to help us get by and the fabulous and powerful ideas that come out of our challenges.

A script evolved through the creation of puppets, but my story never found a conclusion. I was uncomfortable scripting some of characters that were from a culture of which I was not a part and I did not feel I could ever manage the logistics or the boldness to perform it. I did not even have the confidence to share with friends and ask for their feedback. I felt stuck and could not continue. In fact, seven puppet-heads later, I gave up. None of the puppets were completed and I simply left the project. I was too afraid to share it and I didn’t know how to end it anyway.

4. So I had given up? What did that mean? I thought it meant that I just couldn’t work on that project any longer, but that I would come back to puppetry in time. I would have to if I were going to use puppetry in my thesis research. So I made the decision to try again. I was nervous about it, but I had the support of my instructors in my museum education course and was eager to at least get back into creating puppets. I thought this project would be a sort of prototype for the work I hoped to do with students. I needed to figure out what it would look like if I was going to share this with the students. Perhaps this was fallacious thinking: if I really wanted students to engage with their own beliefs and values and to have confidence that they can be the force for transformation in their own lives, it shouldn’t come from my knowledge of what this experience would be like. But, I didn’t really think their work should be like mine; I just needed to know that it was possible and how, so I could rationalize this work.

I created a puppet show for my final course project. I wanted it to trouble our notions of museum representation and to express my personal concerns with the Museum of Anthropology as a museum that housed stolen artifacts, as well as my concerns with being a part of it as a course participant. The final work incorporated three characters, all of whom represented parts of me. One was a marionette of the idealistic grad student who is extremely critical and who speaks out against oppression. She wants to know why the other character, a larger rod puppet representing the more hesitant classroom teacher, was reluctant to speak out against the cultural injustices perpetuated by the museum. They debate, but do not listen to one another. The third character embodied by a mask that I wore, represented transcendent possibility between the two opposing forces. She listened compassionately so that the two puppets felt heard and were able to hear one another.

By extending the metaphors by which we understand ourselves, we gain new perspectives on our challenges. For instance, by extending the metaphor in which we see our teacher selves as vessels of knowledge filling up students, we become more aware of the directionality of learning and its implications for schools. We begin to consider the ways in which students’ prior knowledge and teachers’ lifelong learning are devalued. If
we allow our thinking to shift, moving, for example, from the linear empty vessel metaphor, we may allow ourselves to see a non-linear path of learning as productive.

At the conclusion of my puppet presentation, the class discussed the performance and the concepts behind it. Some comments seemed critical while others taking the risk I had. One of my peers asked why we were not engaging with the questions that presentation. Another have felt freer to respond if they have felt freer to respond if they puppets to help them speak. This idea opened the door (or at least the window) to see possibilities, some of which I was unable to see until fairly now.

For example, one person might present her point of view through a puppet and simply responding. Others might create opposing points of view. Discussion this way, defending character, as opposed to being voice. Another student felt free if they were not themselves, metaphor. This was the my awareness that to create a character. I then began to envision the puppet is best not to literally represent the individual and his or her representation. Rather were the puppet, the research students that would encourage self-reflection on metaphor. We could have an entire project on reflection on the point of view of a character. They might feel more confined to one's own characters representing, rather were the beginning of space. For example, one person might present her point of view through a puppet and simply responding. Others might create opposing points of view. Discussion this way, defending character, as opposed to being voice. Another student felt free if they were not themselves, metaphor. This was the my awareness that to create a character. I then began to envision the puppet is best not to literally represent the individual and his or her representation. Rather were the puppet, the research students that would encourage self-reflection on metaphor. We could have an entire project on reflection on the point of view of a character. They might feel more confined to one's own characters representing, rather were the beginning of space.
My understanding of living inquiry (Irwin & de Cosson, 2004) acknowledges that as teachers, we too are learners, that we do not possess all the "right" answers, and that we can find inspiration, rather than shame, in working from a place of questions instead of answers. By opening ourselves up to the possibility that there may be questions we do not yet even know how to ask, we move beyond the linear path of education. In linear education the answer is preconceived: we know where it is and how to find it; we only have to take students down this "right" path. We begin with a question and end with the answer. In a cyclical or spiral conception of learning, however, neither the students nor the teacher possess the answer, and therefore we open ourselves to possibility. We begin with many questions and those questions evolve into new questions as we learn. This is the process of life-long learning. The spiral nature of living inquiry allows for possibilities we might not have imagined.

Through art and puppetry I inquired deeply into my educational praxis, reflecting deeply and challenging the consistency between my pedagogy and practice, and invited students to engage in their own inquiries. As we embarked on reflective journeys, we did not have a predetermined destination; however, we asked questions and explored new ideas. I knew that we would have to find our own directions, practice skills we wanted to build, find paths that might be beneficial and others that might be less so, try out new ideas, and continue on the journey. We would open ourselves to seeing the world and our place in it from new perspectives. By shifting our thinking patterns we might better commit to conscious and purposeful attention to personal and social change.
II. Finding a frame

Relevancy

Although I began my inquiry looking through the lens of critical pedagogy, my experiences have brought me to a much broader view of relevancy in education. Encouraging learners to think critically, especially in terms of media education; visual cultural studies; and education for political and social justice, remains a priority in my philosophy of art education. However, I see a convergence of greater ideas that must be explored and included in a truly relevant education. In addition to critical cultural studies, I believe that teaching themes of care (Noddings, 2003) and self-knowledge are essential to helping students generate the insight and skills to understand their relationships and responsibilities to themselves, their families, friends, and communities. Without acknowledgement of students' lives; validation of their prior experiences and knowledge; and opportunities for further exploration of their lives, most students will be unreceptive to, or simply incapable of, critically investigating the intricate power relationships of our global world.

Paulo Freire (1970) explained that the narrative nature of teachers' relationships with students "turns them into 'containers,' into 'receptacles' to be 'filled' by the teacher" (p. 57). This banking metaphor, which may also be conceived of as the empty vessel metaphor, maintains oppressive relationships. By extending this metaphor, it follows that:

(a) the teacher teaches and the students are taught;
(b) the teacher knows everything and the students know nothing;
(c) the teacher thinks and the students are thought about;
(d) the teacher talks and the students listen—meekly;
(e) the teacher disciplines and the students are disciplined;
(f) the teacher chooses and enforces his choice, and the students comply;
(g) the teacher acts and the students have the illusion of acting through the action of the teacher;
(h) the teacher chooses the program content, and the students (who were not consulted) adapt to it;
(i) the teacher confuses the authority of knowledge with his own professional authority, which he sets in opposition to the freedom of the students;
(j) the teacher is the Subject of the learning process, while the pupils are mere objects. (Freire, 1970, p. 59)

This conception of education, epitomized by “chalk and talk,” which was generally frowned upon in my teacher education, is still quite prevalent in many types of classrooms today despite a push for more democratic forms of education.

While Freire worked in the context of oppressed peasant communities, his writing still holds significant relevance for educators striving to increase their understanding and practice of democratic education in the public sector^1. To create curricula that are relevant to students’ lives, that engage them beyond simple rote learning, and that inspire students to take active roles in their communities we must value students’ knowledge and experiences and guide them to think critically about their own lives. The banking system of education is not only alienating to oppressed peoples; it is oppressing to all people because it denies capability and agency and squelches confidence. It makes itself so prevalent as to appear inevitable, weakening our ability to perceive other ways of being and thinking and creating an unquestioning populace, subject completely to hegemonic thinking.

Freire warns that educators are raised in a world that fosters the banking concept, making it so prevalent and unavoidable as to be practically invisible (p. 66). Therefore it

^1 I might also add that it is equally valuable to educators in the private sector, but I am afraid this work might be too paradoxical within such a setting. Such an educational setting would need to address its own power structure, and join “the people”, before truly being able to do such work.
is difficult for educators to truly perceive the harm it does to individual and community agency or the its vast implications within classrooms. Freire also points out that activists and educators, intending to support the cause of liberation, often recreate the systems of power they seek to put into question. I see such practices quite often within education for social responsibility or political issues, when teachers teach about democracy rather than with it. By extending the banking metaphor into our teaching practices, we can better see where we unintentionally subscribe, through our language and actions, to such pedagogy. These might include such considerations as the disciplines and content taught, the physical organization of the classroom, the ways in which classes are conducted and dialogue is facilitated, the kinds of language used, the relationship between teacher and students, and the ways in which students are assessed. There are spectrums of power relationships within the various practices of each of these educational sites. For example, classes may be lecture-style in which students listen and take notes; they may lead students in dialogue and exploration around questions the teacher poses, or they may provide students the tools to engage in their own or collaborative inquiries. The classroom might be organized in rows facing the front of the room, grouped by ability level, or arranged in small heterogeneous pods. Even the smallest choices we make about our classroom, the words we choose in response to a student’s idea or the decorations on the wall, speak volumes of our educational philosophy. Thus our great challenge is to practice teaching in a manner by which our actions are increasingly more consistent with what we say we believe about education. “Authentic liberation—the process of humanization—is not another deposit to be made in men. Liberation is praxis: the action and reflection of men upon their world in order to transform it” (Freire, 1970, p. 66).
The critical pedagogues encourage educators to view their practice as a political act. As Freedman and Stuhr (2004) noted, "curriculum is not a neutral enterprise" (p. 822). Marino (1997) explained, "The assumption is that education ought to be neutral, and that neutral is not a political position, which of course it is. It is a maintaining political position; it keeps power relations exactly the way they are" (p. 125). Complacent teachers encourage complacency in their students, creating easily manipulated citizenry.

According to Henry Giroux (1995), "Schooling is about the production of citizens and the responsibilities of citizenship represents an ethical compact that makes primary the language of community solidarity, and the public good" (p. 297). Therefore, we should be "organizing school life around a version of citizenship that educates students to make choices, think critically, and believe they can make a difference" (p. 298). By gaining tools to be critical consumers of media, students will "develop techniques of self-defense against...propaganda" (Chomsky, 1999, p. 26).

Kevin Tavin, a contemporary theorist in the field of visual culture speculated that the dismissal of popular culture by some of the early members of the Frankfurt School as offering "no redeeming political possibilities" and as being "responsible for manipulating consciousness through a totalizing system of false propaganda and mass deception" may have been responsible for perpetuating the division between so-called high and low culture (Tavin, 2003, p. 199, footnote 2). Theorists within critical visual and material culture studies advocate the elevation of low or popular culture into a discipline of study. By doing so, educators and educational theorists hope to increase students' awareness of the subtextual messages of culture, helping students "begin to see how certain forms of popular culture may have helped maintain hegemonic beliefs in ways that seem natural or unproblematic" (p. 199).
I support this push for curriculum whose relevance lies in its ability to aid citizens in making sense of their world. Visual literacy is essential to understanding the complex relationships between corporations, politics, the environment, marketing and consumption, war and peace, curriculum, labour and leisure, and between different countries. Great and intentional effort must be taken to make evident these relationships that have been so obscured through marketing and media, politics, education, and engineering the writing of history. The "regimenting of the public mind," as it was labeled in Edward Bernay's manual for the public-relations industry, has trained the public to take their reality for granted (Chomsky, 1997, p. 137). Much of Berney's writing about "engineering of consent" as "the essence of the democratic process" was drawn from his effective use of propaganda in Woodrow Wilson's agency, the Committee on Public Information, during World War I. The person who was perhaps most impressed by Wilsonian propaganda was Adolf Hitler, who was quite capable of learning from the experiences of the United States, correctly predicting "that next time Germany would not be defeated in the propaganda war..." (p. 138). It is this force against which educators are in action as they build and share the tools by which students may make more informed decisions about how to live in and respond to the world.

In order to take action, however, we must not only help students see their relationship to culture, we must ensure that as educators we see ourselves as a part of it as well. Helping students become more aware of the merchandizing of global visual culture can facilitate more mindful and responsible consumption and make possible creative
resistance, such as culture jamming, as suggested by Darts (2004). According to Darts, the term culture jamming refers to “creative cultural critique” (p. 322) through the “creation of satirical forms of visual representation” (p. 321). However, many art educators fall prey to the common pitfall, illustrated by Freedman and Stuhr (2004), of teaching that visual culture can be “useful when co-opted for positive educational purposes, such as for saving endangered species, protecting the environment, or promoting human rights; however it can have negative effects as well when it colonizes, stereotypes, and disenfranchises” (p. 818). This statement seems to suggest that educators exist beyond the influences of visual culture, therefore maintaining some sort of benevolent objectivism. Tavin (2003) warns, “…[I]t is important that educators not appear to be neutral, nor should they appear to be so removed from culture that they can position themselves as a one-way conduit to administer academic knowledge to their students. When educators relinquish claims of objectivity they acknowledge that they are too enmeshed in the culture to be free of it” (p. 200).

Freedman and Stuhr’s statement also simplifies the individual’s relationship to the broad and complex subjects of environmental protection and human rights in our world of globalization and fails to learn from the constructivist approach “that sees youngsters as having much to teach the adults-about art and life itself” (Jeffers, 2003, p. 24). Teachers’ responsibility is not to tell students how to live and respond to the world but to cultivate the “emergence of individuals’ natural motivation to continually learn, grow, and develop in positive and self-determining ways” (Csikszentmihalyi & Hermanson, 1995, p. 70). By assuming that we as educators know and can address all the pertinent

2 Examples of culture jamming “subvertisements” can be found on the Adbusters magazine website: http://adbusters.org

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issues of our times and can teach students the “correct” way to respond to those issues, we neglect our responsibility and opportunity to hear the stories of students’ lives, to address the skills that will allow youth to make meaning and judgments from conflicting messages, to identify personal belief systems, and to live in accordance with their own beliefs throughout their lives.

As the education becomes increasingly relevant to students lives, treating them as subjects rather than objects of learning, they will take greater initiative in their learning. However, it is the practice of the lived curriculum not simply the written curriculum that ultimately has the greatest impact on education. If every time I, as the teacher, ask a question it is because I possess the answer and want to see if my students do too, I am still functioning within the banking metaphor. If, however, when I ask a question it is because I genuinely desire to know what my students think or because I think they can help me understand how they see the world, then I am truly engaging in inquiry and shifting our conception of and approach to learning. “The students—no longer docile listeners—are now critical co-investigators in dialogue with the teacher. The teacher presents the material to the students for their consideration, and re-considers his earlier considerations as the students express their own” (Freire, 1970, p. 68). It is not only the students who are learners, but the teacher.

**Inquiry**

For curriculum to be truly relevant to students, critical ideas must be presented in ways that not only honour students’ experiences, but also help them find personal connections to the world. As Grumet (1995) explained, “What is basic to education is neither the system that surrounds us nor the situation of each individual’s lived
experience. What is basic to education is the relation between the two” (p. 16). Inquiry-based learning uses constructivist principles to connect students' intrinsic motivation and prior knowledge with pursuit of understanding the larger world contexts. “In a constructivist classroom, emphasis is placed on first knowing that knowledge is not transferred directly from the teacher to the students. Rather, knowledge is built (or constructed) by the students according to the prior experience and understanding they bring to the lesson” (Llewellyn, 2002, p. 30). According to Llewellyn, “Doing inquiry empowers the students to answer their own questions. The teacher becomes the guide and mentor for that process” (p. 8). Danielle, a beginning inquiry practitioner interviewed in Llewellyn’s text, Inquire Within: Implementing Inquiry-Based Science Standards corroborated these claims, saying,

Through inquiry, I feel students are better able to ask questions and pursue their own answers. It encourages self-responsibility and lifelong learning. It also enables them to design a reliable investigation, become strong in their convictions, and to value other people’s points of view and ideas. They seem to be less afraid to ask questions in front of their peers and hopefully, they feel they can make a contribution, whether it’s big or small, to the group they are working with. And I see kids taking on leadership roles in group settings and feeling good about themselves. That’s what school should be all about (p. 140).

Such expressions about the philosophy and practice of learning support both the importance of intrinsic motivation and the power of relevant learning that connects individuals with their world.

Teachers experience breakthroughs, as well, as they open up to new conceptions of teaching and lifelong learning. Lucia, another teacher interviewed in Inquire Within (2002) perceived,

Teachers are expected to have the answers, but I now realize that struggling with a phenomenon is a natural way of constructing knowledge.
That's how we learn. Today, I am comfortable with the fact that I can have a doctoral degree and still be searching for answers and to make sense of my teaching (p. 142).

Lucia continues by sharing her perceptions in her new educational role:

I also have many students that challenge my thinking and the positions I take on certain topics. At first, I was uncomfortable with anyone challenging my authority, but I have adjusted to that, and as a result, I feel we both benefit. There is a Russian word for this, “obucher.” It means to be both a teacher and a learner. I don’t believe we have a word similar to this in English (p. 144).

Questions can help us see the possibility of multiple truths, an asset to individuals both as citizens of the world and a teacher/learners of a classroom. By viewing learning as inquiry, often responding to questions with questions, we all become lifelong learners, constantly striving to be better educators, better participants in a democracy, better members of a community, better versions of ourselves.

Perhaps the greatest challenge of practicing inquiry throughout life is remaining open to the unknown. As an educator and researcher, struggling to increase the relevance of my curriculum and instruction I have found that inquiry, as an educational philosophy and research methodology, supports and guides me in my shifting practice. To practice inquiry, a teacher must move beyond, and truly consider all the implications of, the banking metaphor. According to Llewellyn’s observations, teachers foster inquiry in their classrooms when, among other actions, they are, “Making learning meaningful by exploring student interests,” “basing lessons on students’ prior suppositions,” “Using investigations to anchor new information to previous knowledge,” “Posing prompts and clarifying and rephrasing student questions and responses rather than divulging answers so that students can begin to answer their own questions,” “Asking follow up questions to student answers,” “Maintaining appropriate classroom management during hands-on
investigations by displaying rules in a positive way, providing expectations, structure, and creating a safe and well-organized room,” “Arranging students’ seats to work in groups,” “Focusing the lesson on engaging, relevant, and problem-solving situations,” “Keeping students on task by having them support their findings by debating, challenging, and questioning their conclusions,” “assessing student performance in a variety of forms,” and “Helping students assess their own progress” (p. 59). These actions refer to the development of curriculum and the engagement of students and teachers in the lived curriculum, as well as the organization of the classroom and classroom management. While project-based art education maintains a stronghold in many art classrooms, a growing population of artists and art educators are drawn to practicing principles of inquiry-based education. In fact, the teacher institute in inquiry, hosted by the Exploratorium in San Francisco, drew art educators to work alongside educators and researchers from various disciplines (Llewellyn, 2002, p. 3).

Inquiry supports artful ways of thinking, giving meaningful direction to art instruction. Walker (2001) provides practical applications for inquiring into meaning making through art in her text *Teaching Meaning in Artmaking*. She provides support for art inquiry by explaining,

Highly visible in current school reform literature is the notion that students be engaged with understanding and meaning making. This constructivist approach to teaching and learning argues that the goal of teaching is students’ understanding and that students *construct* knowledge, not simply reproduce it through memorization, recall, or routinized application. Artmaking conceived as an exploration and expression of big ideas reflects a constructivist approach (p. xiv).

In addition to embracing relevant, problem-posing pedagogy in art education, educational theorists recognize the forces that make this shift difficult. Freedman
(2003) noted that conditions within the school system (politics, class size, student culture/motivation, etc...) often compel educators "to simplify and technicize information from the discipline (art), often losing or hiding its deeper meanings" (p. 111). To counter the presentation of visual art as a medium whose value is only visual and technical, Freedman suggests, "curriculum should focus on issues of self because that is where learning takes place" (p. 108). Through art inquiry, build deeper connections between the self and the world.

Rather than positing art as simply the practice of creation or reproduction, arts-based inquiry respects art as a discipline through which we can learn by looking inside, outside, and between. "When we fully attend to something, we connect with life and thus fulfill the basic human need for relatedness" (Csikszentmihalyi & Hermanson, 1995, p. 71). Connectivity motivates us to pursue our own inquiries, to seek out the incomplete pieces of our understanding and to commit to creating new ties. These ties may be between new and prior knowledge, one discipline and another, personal experience and theory, theory and practice, self and other, self and community, self and world, or community and world. Freedman also suggests investigating our understanding of ourselves within the world through inquiry into conflicts "because conflicts often give rise to meaning" (Freedman, 2003, p. 124). My research began with such an inquiry, focusing particularly on internal conflicts, how culture and life experiences give them meaning and how individuals understand and act upon them within the context of their lives.

Through this inquiry, I strived to develop and live principles of relevancy in learning. As Sergiovanni (1994) stated, "Schools have an obligation to teach citizenship and to develop caring adults, and the best way to teach these values is by actually living them" (p. xviii). I have found in my practice of living and teaching in ways that are
consistent with my beliefs, that the desire to be a particular way is not always a strong enough force to induce successful transformation. However, the humbling process of living an inquiry teaches many the understanding recorded in Denali Elementary School's (1991) *A Collection of Thoughts to Live By* that "Anything worth doing is worth doing poorly—at least for a little while" (Sergiovanni, p. 166). I have certainly been guided by such an insight throughout my inquiry.

Inquiry is a living process that is constantly evolving. Our understandings of our questions change as we gain new experience and knowledge or gain new insights into the significance of prior knowledge. Hollywood movies, classical Western literature, and our media-saturated culture have done living inquiry a great disservice by making us believe that by finding the right path and working hard, we will reach the successful conclusion. In reality, personal and social transformation come from an unending process of learning. We cannot expect challenges to simply disappear, especially if we are to continue to grow individually or collectively. Through art, we may stay present to and reflective of our challenges and transformations.

**Arts-based action research**

Support for inquiry as a central focus in art education is well documented in the field of arts-based research. Arts-based inquiry pushes art educators, and educators who engage in artistic ways of thinking, to place themselves within an inquiry and be open to a process of personal growth that is determined by more than simple learning deposits. Visual arts-based research has strong foundations in the study of meaning making. Weber (2002) states:
Images are essential to human sense making: We see and think and communicate using images. Like words, images can be used, construed, and read in different ways and can serve multiple functions. Images can be used to lie, to question, to imagine, to critique, to theorize, to mislead, to flatter, to hurt, to unite, to relate, to narrate, to explain, to teach, to represent, and to express the full range of human emotion and experience. Like words, images are part of who we are, who we think we are, and who we become—they are integral to questions of identity and purpose. Like other aspects of sense making, how images create meaning is a dynamic process involving dialectical negotiation or interaction between the social and the personal aspects in any given culture. (p. 1)

The creation of and reflection on visual art practices inspires new learning and new ways to learn. By using arts-based inquiry both with students and within one's research, art educators can transform their understanding and practice of art education.

Action research, researching one's own practice, supports pedagogy of personal and social transformation. According to McNiff (2002), "It helps you live out the things you believe in, and enables you to give good reasons every step of the way" (p. 3). By engaging with the possibility of change within an educator's own practice, she can direct her pedagogical practices closer to her principles to address what Jack Whitehead called "living contradictions" (McNiff, p.8). Personal growth, self-reflection and reflexivity, and an open-ended cyclical process are guiding components of action research (Carson & Sumara, 1997; McNiff, 2000; Zeichner, 2001).

I understand arts-based research as a subfield of action research closely tied to hermeneutics. "Hermeneutics begins from the premise that human reality—that is the way we think about, discuss, represent, and convey possibilities—is embedded in language, both written and spoken" (Smits, 1997, 287). Arts-based action research inquires into meaning making through visual sign systems. It is through the creation of and reflection on visual art that learners explore and express their understandings of their
selves and others. It is through engagement with my own art and art of others that I as
an artist, researcher, and teacher explore the significance of metaphor and meaning
making in stimulating personal transformation. I draw from some of the key concepts of
a/r/tography as I “inquire in the world through a process of art making and writing...that
are not separate or illustrative of each other but are interconnected and woven through
each other to create additional meanings.” (Springgay, Irwin & Wilson, in press, p.2).
Rather than describing the art, my writing is integral to the art and my art to the writing.
Thus I see that in this arts-based inquiry, learning is drawn through visual and written
metaphor, as well as the relationship between the two.

The use and interpretation of visual metaphor within art guides us to reflect on
process and understand ourselves, our thoughts and our actions, in new ways, creating an
opening for continual evolution through praxis: acting on reflections, reflecting on
actions. “At the moment of production, new knowledge affects and alters one’s
understanding of what was previously known” (Carson & Sumara, 1997, p. xix). The
metaphors by which we live can inspire us to become more productive and to adopt new
perspective. They might allow me to see “the solution of my problems” as “a large
volume of liquid, bubbling and smoking, containing all of [my] problems, either
dissolved or in the form of precipitates, with catalysts constantly dissolving some
problems (for the time being) and precipitating out others” (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980, p.
143). This perspective brings with it a new understanding of the ways in which problems
are managed. At the same time, believing deeply embedded or culturally dominant
metaphors, may trap us in unhealthy situations if we frame our reality within a metaphor
that maintains unjust hegemony. “...[C]hanges in our conceptual system do change what
is real for us and affect how we perceive the world and act upon those perceptions” (pp. 145-146). Simply put, metaphors impact our lives powerfully; we gain power by making them evident and becoming aware of their impact.

Using visual metaphor may make the underlying constructs of cultural constructs more transparent. By representing binaries such as ‘good’ and ‘bad’ or ‘right’ and ‘wrong’, for example, we may see a tightrope (right) hung over a pit of venomous snakes (wrong). Similar imagery might be used to represent the “success-failure” binary. If we can have only one or the other, we must tread a very fine line in our journey from problem to solution, that makes any divergence seem to be bad or wrong. By exploring contiguity, an a/r/tographic rendering, we break open the binary systems and conceive of new ways of thinking and being (Springgay, Irwin & Wilson, in press, p. 2). If we transform this problem-based metaphor and engage in a living inquiry to seek new insight into a challenge, we may create and enter into new possibilities.
III. Stepping through

The research site
I engaged in this inquiry with the students of a grade 6/7 split class at an urban elementary school in a diverse neighborhood of Vancouver. While a majority of students are of Chinese heritage, many immigrant or first generation, the school also hosts students of West Indian, Pacific Islander, European, Central and South American, First Nations, and other backgrounds. Approximately four fifths of the students in this class are of Chinese ancestry and most of them speak English as a second language. The faculty recently experienced many years of strong administrative leadership and a history of engagement in teacher-directed initiatives and university research projects prior to this project. The teacher, MJ, is an experienced teacher who practices teacher inquiry with her class and encourages critical engagement with personal and social issues within her classroom. Her students all call her by her first name. MJ is a Ph.D. student and a participant in several university research projects. She has extensive experience and interest in involving social justice themes in her classroom using the arts.

The circumstances of the research site were unusual in that I entered the classroom as an American graduate student/educator/artist/researcher in a Canadian school. Although I had prior experience as an art teacher in an American school, my experience in Canadian schools was limited primarily to an experience as a research assistant the previous semester interviewing student teachers as part of the Multiliteracies Project, a research project of the University of British Columbia, and an experience as an artist-in-residence the previous year, creating a community mural for the school with MJ’s class. From my experience as an artist-in-residence working on the mural, I was familiar with the school and many of the teachers and students. As I had worked with the
grade 7 students when they were in grade 6, I was familiar with about half the class, and they with me.

**Data collection overview**

For six weeks I observed most of the class periods throughout the day, and taught a unit in metaphor and puppetry for approximately five 40-minute periods each week. We began the unit by making journals in which to create and interpret verbal and visual metaphor. We explored personal life challenges, the ways in which we understand and respond to those challenges, as well as alternate ways in which we would like to approach the challenges. The students then considered their challenges metaphorically and designed and created puppets that represented them within their challenge. At the beginning of the fifth week, students shared puppet-based presentations of their challenges for the class. Metaphors evolved as a key tool for connecting art and personal challenges; however, I felt that I had not made this relationship clear and relevant for the students. Therefore, the students and puppets focused instead on supporting each other and suggesting new ways to approach their challenge. Through improvisation, students considered what story they would like their puppet to share. Each student created, through script or improvisation, a solo or collaborative presentation to share with the class. Students gave one another written feedback and support on both their challenges and their presentations.

**The inquiry practice**

This puppetry unit inquired into the possibility that we all, students and teacher/learner/researcher might gain new perspective on the world through the process of creating art. Students initially considered the multiple roles of art in our lives and
what art, specifically puppetry, might teach them. I introduced arts-based inquiry and presented some examples in which the artist used art as a medium to inquire into an idea or understand a challenge. We considered that learning may occur not only by viewing a work of art, but through the process of creating the artwork, as well. By engaging with the metaphor within artwork, we considered the big idea or challenge into which the artists inquired. I explained that the students would have the opportunity to investigate a challenge in their own lives through puppetry, and they created journals in which to record their thoughts and their thought processes throughout this investigation. By attempting to help students apply the concepts I myself was still struggling to comprehend, my understanding of metaphors evolved. One challenge in teaching metaphor, I found, is that we internalize the relationships between the metaphoric signifier and the signified (reality) until we take for granted that the metaphors by which we live, or our perceptions of reality, constitute the one and only version of reality. Instead of seeing a metaphor as a lens through which we perceive the world, we believe our perspectives are objective. I grew increasingly aware of, and desired to make explicit, the intricacies and impact of metaphor in our lives.

5. In reflection, I want to go back and help the confused me who thought her research was about teaching, rather than learning. Perhaps this observation could have helped refocus my energies. As it was, I was scared witless about beginning this research. I felt entirely unprepared for the challenge I set before myself and wondered why I thought I could do it in the first place. Nevertheless, I had convinced MJ and my entire research committee that not only was I capable, but I was ready. Perhaps, I thought, it's just a lack of confidence and I have to psyche myself (and others) up for it. On day one, I felt prepared. I had resources and ideas to prepare students to work with metaphors. Unfortunately, in my self-doubt about my ability to guide students in their own processes, I clung to instruction that was so narrowly linear that it removed much of the creativity and play from this work.
Still, I was resolved that I would follow through with this research. For me, it was do it or quit. Quit meant leaving the field forever. I think maybe it is a shock for people who know me to read this. To know that I was this close to leaving the educational field to which I have essentially devoted my entire life. Why? Because I believed I was no good at it; that my ideas have no merit...that I did not inspire my students. I was lacking some key skills, or perhaps I simply didn’t have the right passion.

It’s not so easy to share these fears with other educators. If you are an educator, especially if you are getting an advanced degree in education, you are supposed to be committed to teaching. You are supposed to know what you want to do, to know that you love it and are committed to doing it. All I knew was that I wanted to do work that inspired others...and I was afraid. And I was afraid I wasn’t there...and I didn’t know...I had no choice but to choose. I chose stay...and push on. I chose stay...and push on.

The first step was getting clear on the objectives of the research. How do I push forward? Take one step...and then another. The first step was getting clear on the objectives of the research. I began planning the curriculum and sharing my ideas...tentatively.
Did I make sense? I was not sure.

I was still running on a contingency plan...
...either I succeed at this or it would be time to find a new job. Stay or go.

No, it wasn't a choice for me.
It was a TEST: do it right or get out.

But I didn't even know what right looked like!

How would I even know if I was on the right path?

...I had to psyche myself up for the research.

I had to find the enthusiasm and joy inside me to trust that I would find a path.

I would do my best.

I would prove that I could be successful...I would inspire.

Instruction for extending metaphors began by reading and interpreting extended metaphor poems. Then we practiced extending metaphors by looking at a visual metaphor of the “student as empty vessel” teaching paradigm (see appendix A), talking about extended metaphor poetry, and discussing a visual metaphor that some of the students had used the previous year to express their conception of their community when designing their community mural. The class had decided that they would represent their collective identities as a puzzle in which each student was a piece. I was not entirely comfortable with the connotations of this metaphor; it seemed to signify a division between the students that I felt was contrary to their intended expression of community. When a group of student directors for the project sat down and thought through the extended message of the puzzle metaphor, they too had concerns that they had brought
back to the class, and eventually chose to change the concept of the mural. I reviewed the previous year's puzzle metaphor with the current class and reflected on one of its extensions: What would it say about our community if the puzzle were missing one of the puzzle pieces? In small groups students generated ideas that extended the meaning of this metaphor into their classroom community. They considered many interpretations and saw that many interpretations are possible from a metaphor. This multiplicity of meaning in extending metaphors suggests the possibility of generating understandings that we had not before considered.

To connect metaphors to self-perception I simply asked the students outright to create metaphors for challenges in their lives and document them in their journals. Most of the students were simply confused by this assignment. The very few that did complete the entry seemed unclear on what metaphors are. I hoped they would be able to help one another extend metaphors, but I found that many of the students had some difficulty with this task as well. I realized it might have been helpful to have specific instruction on how to extend a metaphor, and began to develop questions students might ask one another in order to help each other perceive the implications for a metaphor in one's own life. I began searching for ways to make sense, for me and for the students, of the metaphors in our lives.

The first structured lesson on creating metaphor utilized Venn diagrams to brainstorm comparisons between two unlike things. As I explained, we can compare any two things and find some similarity if we get creative enough. Some of the relationships will be more meaningful than others, and metaphors may need to be altered to find the most meaningful way to describe our understandings. I had asked students to create two
circles, one for the signified being described (first their eyes, then their heart) and one for the signifier, the unlike thing they would use to represent some part of themselves. Inside each circle each student described the signifier or signified. Where the two circles overlapped, they described what the two objects had in common. Because I stressed that similarities and relationships could be found between any two things, the students struggled somewhat to find a focus. I felt that this approach was not working well. Although I understood metaphors in a literary sense and felt confident that my metaphorical understandings of the world powerfully influenced my ways of being in the world, I was unsure of how to guide others to consider the metaphors that informed how they understood their own experiences and challenges. I decided to try another approach.

Using visualization, I removed words from the process, hoping to decrease the pressure students felt. I guided students to imagine themselves within their challenges, fill themselves up with the emotions the challenge evokes, and allow images to flow into their heads. They drew visual images from their mental images and seemed energized by this activity. They concentrated more deeply on their images, drawing in complete silence. However, not knowing how to help them extend these metaphors back into their life experiences, I continued to be unsure of how to proceed. When each learner's journey is unique, how do we support each individual in his or her learning process?

Again, I abandoned the path upon which I embarked and shifted my approach. Fearing that the students had gone too long without engaging with puppets, I took MJ's suggestion and refocused on puppetry. Using practice puppets that they made from paper bags to engage in empathic drama exercises, students considered the challenges and goals faced by characters from their previous novel study, *Harris and Me* (Paulsen, 1993).
They worked with these characters through drama, puppetry, discussion, and journaling for several days.

When it seemed that these exercises were an unproductive tangent, my own puppet, a literal representation of me, shared my experience of confusion with the students.

The puppet spoke of my challenge of working through feelings of defeat and my desire to give up. Then she described a visual metaphor I was trying to internalize and live into. This metaphor was an image generated from a skiing trip I had taken with the class. Like many of the students, this was my first time. Reluctantly headed down the hill, unable to stop. I aimed for a large snow bank and, by the grace of gravity, slowly gained speed down the hill. Having missed my bunny hill with only vague instructions. Not plow I shimmied down the snow bank without finesse and skied to the towrope exultant. I wanted to try again! Despite what appeared to be failure, I had had fun and was ready to try again.
I held on to this image as I wondered how I could attain such a confident perspective in my research process. Working in groups, the students made suggestions and I concluded the day feeling refreshed and optimistic from the engagement. I resolved to stay confident. From my current vantage point post-research, I can see that this puppetry presentation constituted only a small part in my growth process, but it was a motivating force that allowed me to push forward into another cycle of my personal inquiry. Of course I would not change overnight, but I resolved to practice maintaining a positive outlook, to organize my thoughts more clearly, to generate steps to scaffold student learning, and to seek out support to sustain my confidence. My resolve did not take me far.

I was so focused on figuring out how to show students what they were to do, that I lost sight of the journey of learning and I forgot how to have fun. My focus was simply on the next step. I asked students to imagine themselves within their challenge once again and chose a metaphor to represent themselves within their challenge. As I believed that I had not given enough direction to help students extend and deepen metaphors, I only suggested that their puppet represent them metaphorically, but did not require it. Therefore, students worked with literal representations of themselves, making further discussion of metaphor more difficult. However, many of them did feel confident using metaphoric representations and extending their puppet’s metaphor to investigate the metaphors’ implications for their challenges.

The next step was to begin studio work on the puppets. Nearly halfway through the six-week project, we were able to finally take a break from the confusion of difficult theoretical concepts and allow the creative process to bring insight. I had hoped that
engaging with art making might encourage further discussion around students’ challenges, although impromptu dialogue did not manifest. The students began puppet construction by creating armatures for the heads of their puppets from newspaper, toilet paper tubes and tape. They covered this frame with a layer of newspaper strips dipped in wallpaper paste. While they worked they chatted about everything except for their challenges. After completing the armatures, the students painted the paper mâché heads. They sewed felt bodies for the characters and added details and clothing with paint or other fabric. The puppets needed to be assembled quickly in order to give students time to use their puppets as tools for exploring their challenges. As a result, much of the sewing was completed at home.

With the puppets assembled, we devoted some class time to having the puppets share their challenges with one another and get advice and to journaling about these experiences. I had hoped that by this point students would feel that they were making some progress with their challenges in either understanding them differently or feeling able to take some sort of action to improve their situation. Despite the use of the word “challenge” that even students had adopted, we all clearly were still labouring under the problem-solution paradigm. I made small attempts to shift away from this linear way of thinking. I asked students to consider the many sites from which they receive messages about how they should act or be. The students then recorded and assessed the impact of the messages that they receive from each of these sites in their journals. This was a beginning step in acknowledging the complexity of personal challenges and the impact of perspective on how we understand and address them. However, this experience was a
product of my initiative, rather than evolving from students’ own observations resulting from their experiences with their puppets, as I wished it were.

The class spent the last Friday before their puppet presentations planning. As the class had performed an adaptation of *A Christmas Carol* the previous term, I made sure to emphasize that we would have *presentations* as opposed to *performances*. Since students would not be performing someone else’s words, but rather be sharing their own experiences working through a personal challenge, it would not be necessary for them to script their presentations. In fact, it would be perfectly acceptable, in light of the limited time we had to prepare the presentations, for students’ puppets to simply speak from the heart. As Emma explained, they did not need to memorize any lines because their stories were all inside of them already. The students generated a list of decisions that needed to be made before the presentations the following school day. In small groups they determined the logistics of the presentations: they would have use of a puppet stage behind which they would be hidden and could bring a script if they desired; they could work in groups or independently to prepare and present their ideas; they all would all be prepared to present on the same day; the order for presentations would be determined first through volunteers and then by random name-pulling; and they would give feedback after presentations without sharing publicly. Thus, I drafted feedback sheets for the students to use during the presentations. These sheets ultimately served two purposes. In addition to giving students an opportunity to privately share their thoughts about one another’s challenges the response sheets motivated the students to really focus on the message of each presentation so that they would be able to give feedback that was specific to their understanding rather than responding with a generic, “Good job”. Their teacher
suggested that the students return from their audience seats on the floor to their chairs to write their feedback after each presentation. By returning to familiar space and writing for a timed minute, they maintained a level of concentration equal to that of their focused, timed responses during their novel study.

Despite initial giggling during the first presentation, the students settled into the process of listening closely for the message being imparted by the often-humourous puppets. The feedback they gave one another was extremely supportive, as they have been trained to be, and many students noted in their journals that the messages from their peers really helped them feel heard and understood. I did not prescribe the type of feedback that they would give. Their writing ranged from observations about the puppet, puppetry, and challenge to advice and empathy for the situation shared.

After the presentations I commended the students and the puppets commended each other for hard work and for supporting one another. MJ gathered the students and puppets into a circle for high fives. I was unsure of how to follow up and reflect on the process with the students. At the time I was not yet able to see the emergent themes of the research upon which students might have reflected: living inquiry, contiguity between binaries, and metaphor. My mind was filled with so many different foci that I was unsure where to begin. I debriefed the process over the next two days by having students read and respond to the comments written to them by their peers after their presentations and by reflection on their learning in each step of the process. MJ agreed to give them time in the following week to complete their journal covers to give them time to reflect and work. Many of them seemed uninterested in reflecting on the process at this point. As I had not presented the process as an ongoing, cyclical process, perhaps they felt that they
had already reached the conclusion. I suppose we had reached a conclusion of sorts, as I would be saying goodbye and their puppets would soon go home with them. They would continue to work through their challenges, all their life challenges, with varying degrees of reflection, in their daily lives. Hopefully, they would take some of the tools of metaphor and arts-based inquiry and reflection with them into their futures. In order to have some closure on the process we shared, I asked students and their puppets to join me in a gratitude circle. One at a time we shared our thanks for others who had helped us during this process.

Methods of data collection

I began collecting data on the first day in the classroom. Every student in the class, participants and non-participants, created a journal in which to record their experiences and thoughts during the research process. I too had made a journal and started recording the questions I would ask the students, as well as my own responses to those questions. I also documented the lived curriculum and the planned curriculum as I intended it in a computer journal. Here I reflected on my successes and frustrations from the day and recorded what appeared to be the next step based upon my reflections. I shortly found that even the limited lesson plans that I had prepared for the first week would have to be significantly rethought and reworked based on the events of the previous day’s events and on the emergent concepts that I would need to address.

Students worked in small groups to discuss many of the themes that emerged through the research, to share their own ideas and experiences, and to gain clarity about how to proceed. These small group discussions were recorded, as well as some large group conversations in which I asked groups to report their ideas. Table groups were
organized so that everyone at a table with an audiocassette recorder had given consent to participate the research. Because they had prior experience being recorded for research, students needed little guidance to turn on the recorders when discussing ideas with their groups, record the date and topic on a tape recorder log that I had provided, and insert a new tape when the tape they were using ran out. MJ photographed students working when I was engaged with other responsibilities. Having another research-oriented adult in the classroom during the first week or so was an asset in data collection. As a more experienced researcher, she remembered to turn on the tape recorder when I was speaking or when students were discussing. Throughout the six-week term, I conducted two interviews with MJ and corresponded by e-mail for responses to specific questions between interviews. I also recorded some of the lessons I was teaching so that I could analyze and learn from my own actions in order to reflect on my practice. I felt unable to listen to these recordings until after the research was complete. I was overwhelmed by my perception that I had to progress and always felt short on time, both in and out of class. In retrospect, I see that if my reflection had informed my understanding of what should come next, my direction would have been clearer. Perhaps I would have been too overwhelmed to integrate my new found learning into my teaching so immediately.

Initially, I had also intended to work longitudinally with a small focus group of students to better understand the ideas that arose and to give them opportunities to share their understandings in the research. However, I was reluctant to engage students in a discussion around themes that I did not understand and could not present clearly to them. Of course, I now see that by really listening to them, these themes would likely have emerged more clearly and the rest of the class may have benefited from further
opportunities for engagement. However, I felt unclear on how my research process would work, what I would do with the information I received, if I had the confidence to attempt to make changes to the project as planned, or even if I would be able to develop generative questions through which I could engage the focus group. I recognize that lack of confidence played a large role in my decision-making throughout this research and more often than not it held me back from attempting pedagogical innovation during the unit. Ultimately, this impacted not only my teaching, but also the data that I was able to collect. My apprehension about not knowing what data would emerge from small group discussions, compounded with my drive to reach the end of the unit in the six-week time period allotted, contributed to my decision to focus my energy on completing the research without focus groups. I felt I would disturb the class by removing students from class work and by acting contrary to the class philosophy in which no student’s ideas were more valuable than another’s. Ultimately, I felt comfortable with this decision; however, I do wonder what ideas might have emerged, what relationships we might have built, and what skills I might have developed through deep inquiry with a small group of students.

Rather than focus solely on aural and written documentation, I attempted to maintain a strong visual component to the data collection. Students illustrated their metaphors in their journals. I also recorded the process visually through word webs or mind maps, photographs, and video. The photographs documented students working collaboratively to help one another create the journals, studio time during puppet construction, as well as the evolution of the puppets themselves. Video was only used to document students’ final puppet presentations and then only presentations that involved only students who had given full consent to participate in the research. Therefore,
students could work freely with whomever they felt most comfortable, and I adapted my documentation to these circumstances. While I could not capture the entire process on film as a result, students were able to work freely and comfortably without concern or consciousness of who had or had not given consent for participation in the research.

Throughout the unit and the analysis process, I recorded my experiences and my emerging understanding of my role as a reflective teacher/learner/facilitator through visual and performative metaphor. By using art to illustrate my ideas, I demonstrated the use of visual metaphor to the students while at the same time extending my own conceptions of art as a pedagogical tool. My written reflections, paintings, and 3-dimensional works of art helped develop and document an emergent theoretical framework for this research. By the end of the data collection, I had collected hundreds of pages of journals (my own and the students’), drawings, audio recordings and writing from group work, as well as the photographs and video recordings of the students’ work.

Methods of data analysis

I began data analysis by searching for emergent themes. After revisiting Lakoff and Johnson’s (1980) text, *Metaphors We Live By* while transcribing the recordings, the significance of metaphors emerged so strongly that I was compelled to rework the underlying pedagogy of this research. The reconceived curriculum, as I imagined it, would have to focus more clearly on understanding the metaphoric frameworks that help us generate meaning from our world. I realized that by moving away from the focus of goal setting and beyond binaries that leave us with only the options of problem or solution, metaphors might lead us toward a reconception of possibility. Thus, emerged the second key concept of the research: contiguity between binaries (Springgay, Irwin &
Wilson, in press). If we could possibilities between right and good and bad, we perhaps would never before considered. On the need to reach a conclusion, we limit ourselves to only one as a problem that must be problem-solution paradigm.

As it occurred to could only have arisen experiences that felt had hoped, I grew key concept: more by living inquiry. I learned committing to a situation that felt uncomfortable, than I could by clinging to the familiar, staying in the secure realm of my strengths, or having someone else show me the way. All of my learning could only have come about by accepting myself where I was and not judging myself as “bad”. Thus I saw that the problem-solution paradigm that guided my research was essentially a metaphoric framework for struggles: when we reach a perceived obstacle, we must go over, under, or through it. This is one way of understanding a
challenge. Perhaps by conceiving of the challenge differently we might stop and look around and notice that the hump is actually a grassy hill that is home to many creatures and around which water flows to sustain life. Over, under, and around may not be the only options, but if we believe they are, we are limited to striving for one of them. Although these themes emerged from looking at my data, at the same time, they created the possibility for me to reflect on my data.

Once I could see the possibility in learning from my living inquiry, I began to revisit my data. After transcribing audio recordings of student group conversations and interviews with MJ, I digitally scanned the pages of students’ journals. I searched for themes or patterns in students’ journals that would provide me insight into the way in which students perceived art and creative processes when entering into the research. I created lists of students’ responses to several journal questions and grouped them by themes. I began to write short analyses of each data set and recorded key quotes. Through these processes, I caught a glimmer of what would become the three key concepts of my research. Processing my experiences into a condensed narrative of reflections on my teaching and learning process also facilitated the identification and development of themes. I searched for meaning within my own words by highlighting big ideas and meaningful quotes from my reading notes; journal writing; audiotape transcription; and reflections, and recording them on note cards. Each note card was labeled in one corner with the location of the idea within the data for reference and in the opposite corner with an emergent theme that the quote or idea reflected. The themes included “curricular development/adaptation”, “cycle of inquiry”, “reflection/praxis”, “goal setting”, “process versus product”, “metaphors”, “effective teaching”, “student-
centred education/constructivism”, and “collaboration”. At this point in the data analysis I expressed my three foci as “the cyclical nature of inquiry and personal growth”, “moving beyond the binary”, and “metaphors/metaphorical frameworks”. Upon reflection it became clear that they corresponded with “living inquiry”, “contiguity”, and “metaphor/metonym”, the first three of the six a/r/tographical renderings as conceived by Springgay, Irwin, & Wilson (in press).

I began a free-writing process in which I wrote continuously for 15 to 20 minutes on each theme: living inquiry, contiguity, and metaphor. Surprisingly, I found that the ideas evolved easily and built naturally on one another. At first I was apprehensive about beginning to write about these subjects, but by taking the pressure off of writing eloquently, I found that I was able to capture the elusive thoughts racing through my mind. As a result, I had words and concepts on which to elaborate, edit, and analyze. I developed this writing into a paper for the Multiliteracies Project at the University of British Columbia as a case study of “multi-modal meaning making,” which I then analyzed further. Concentrating on each theme in turn, I organized all relevant reflections into a word web by cutting out coded reflections from my own writing and arranging them into sub-themes on large sheets of paper. In the end, I had a mind map connecting the ideas of each theme individually, and then drawing relationships between the themes. By writing directly onto the large sheets of paper I was able to elaborate on the ideas that I wanted to emphasize in my analysis. I synthesized the ideas of the mind map into a paper for each of the emergent themes and then returned to my data with clearer ideas about the kinds of support I would need to illustrate my ideas.
At times I felt like the process of synthesizing this data was sort of like cleaning out a room full of drawers and closets that have not been cleaned out for a long time. The room may appear relatively neat and tidy, but the order does not go beyond the surface. Similarly, my brain seemed to have so many cubbyholes filled with ideas that I was not sure what was in them. Sometimes I would take an idea out and try it on because I thought it might be significant. However, I often was not really sure how it would fit with the other ideas, mostly because I was not sure what other ideas were there. I needed an inventory of all the ideas in my head and all the ideas coming from the research, even the ones that just surface and sink back down, becoming seemingly irretrievable. So I began pulling out every idea in my brain and not worrying about where it would go, simply recording it. I tried to clean out every little nook and cranny so that I could start with the basics. Once I had all those ideas on the table, I could start sorting them by the major themes and decide what to do with the pieces that did not fit. They would either have to be explained or thrown out. In the process, however, they were a mess of ideas on a page, not suitable to be shown to anyone.

The meta-analysis of these ideas was like a distillation. I started with some rough ideas, extracted but full of impurities. Then I distilled the data, pulling the big ideas out of it, and writing about them. Then again I pulled the big ideas out of that writing, moved them around, looked at them from different angles, and wrote about those. It was as if each time I got closer and closer to the essence of this research. Ultimately, I tried to pull the big themes out of my reflections, see how they fit together, and organize them into an outline into which I could reorganize my original data and reflections along with new thoughts in order to retheorize the work. Perhaps the hardest things about this was
having faith that all the ideas I had collected throughout my life are of value, that if I
have been drawn to a learning experience that it is not worthless; it will contribute to my
understanding of the world and specifically of my research.

I struggled a great deal throughout this process to simply understand the process
and its relationship to my learning as an artist, researcher, and teacher/learner. Reflecting
on the difficult process of data collection was emotional for me. I keenly felt a sense of
failure and frequently considered quitting. This insecurity brought about a crisis of
identity that again complicated further reflection. It was only through processing these
experiences through my own art, treestory, that I was able to have perspective on the
learning experience and recommit to a new kind of teaching and learning process.
Therefore, these images appear within the writing to document and elaborate upon my
learning and to inspire the imagination and interpretation of the learner/educators who
view them. Despite numerous lapses in confidence, I returned to the classroom and
returned to my writing.

Again I coded my data, this time searching for relevant data in students’ journals,
feedback sheets, and puppet presentation videos. I had chosen seven students to study
longitudinarily from the 19 who had given full consent for participation at the beginning
of the research. Three of these students, Betty; Nick; and Jake, seemed to have very
strong use of metaphor and interesting puppet presentations. Two of the students, Rose
and Susan, also represented themselves metaphorically, but I sensed that I would need to
spend more time reflecting on their personal data to better understand their learning.
Two other students, June and Ryan, did not complete their puppets at all. After analyzing
their journal responses; the video and/or transcripts of their presentations; and their

50
reflections on their peers’ presentations, I took notes directly onto my analyses; searched for data that inspired insights into the three themes; and recorded key quotes. At this point I began to write up my data analysis, beginning chronologically with the earliest data, the meaning I derived from and created in the records of the first day, and continuing through students’ final reflections. I attempt to follow narratives of single students when a longitudinal perspective is helpful to understand what was learned either by the student or by me. Often I follow one of the seven listed above, however, all of the participants provided important data on which I reflected, and several of their stories are shared as well.

As the Multiliteracy Project supported my research, ethical approval had been granted prior to my participation in the project and student participation in the research had been previously solicited and obtained. Because several of the students did not provide full consent for participation in the Multiliteracy Project, I did not collect or record some or all of the data from their personal inquiries. Upon returning their journals, however, I learned that, as a result of ongoing and overwhelmingly positive experiences participating in research through the Multiliteracy Project, many of them had changed their level of consent. Unfortunately, I could not obtain further data on these students at this point, leaving me with incomplete data for some of the students. I chose to include these students in the analysis anyway, at times including selected samples of responses without the support of the entire set of data.

Through analysis of this data set I reconsider how the class’s inquiries can inform both my thinking about teaching and curriculum and about my specific teaching practice. In addition to the curriculum as it was lived, and the written or art work of the students in
response to the prompts I provided, the analysis considers as data my written and artistic reflections throughout the puppetry unit. At times, questioning my curriculum in light of my evolving understanding of emergent pedagogical themes becomes more important than the students' responses to the questions I posed. I attempt, however, to reflect on the data created by students' voices and to learn from their understandings and confusion. I view each set of data as equally significant.

Many months and experiences have passed since the data collection for this research. In this time, my life experiences have been intimately tied to my evolving understanding of and response to this research process and therefore the analysis of the data also is coloured by my continually evolving pedagogy and practice within educational contexts. I attempted to create a living pedagogy: one that was based on what I learned through living, as well as one that changed and grew with me as I brought it into different learning contexts. Thus, my reflections and analysis are not simply based on my understanding of my practice within the context of this research site, but also on my experiences facilitating arts-based learning practices in a variety of formal and informal situations in my life, including an art group for educators comprised mostly of my peers, and a teacher education methods course in art education.
IV. Facing the journey

I preface my analysis by acknowledging that my perceptions of these data and even what I label and collect as data are shaped by my prior life experiences, my socio-cultural and economic background, and from many positions of privilege and power including being educationally, racially, and sexually a member of the dominant class. My life and academic schooling have trained me to ask a particular type of question, to look in particular places for data (possibly to the neglect of other equally or more relevant details), and to interpret what I consider data through a particular type of lens. I have attempted through my study to create places for exploration of identity and the challenge of being fully the person one sees oneself to be. I am aware that I still have much work to do in order to create places in which all people feel equally free to express themselves and all voices are equally heard. I regret that the students’ voices are underrepresented in this work and would strive to address this absence in future research.

Certainly myriad perspectives could be used to derive a variety of interpretations from the data I have collected. As I have only presented a limited perspective of the data and the conclusions that might be drawn from it, one might perceive these conclusions as limited as a result. Yet I am not claiming to know all the answers or to be able to represent my data objectively, only to share my very subjective thoughts and learnings as I try to make meaning from my experiences.

Artful inquiry

The first set of data that I collected in this inquiry was students’ journal entries responding to the following two questions: “What is art?” and “What might you
learn from puppetry?" Early in the unit I wanted us to consider the value of learning art beyond the technical skills of art making that a teacher brings.

The journal responses helped me gain a clearer understanding of the students’ prior understandings of art on which to build. Analysis of their responses confirmed that prior experiences with expressive arts, including for some students participation in the creation of a community mural the previous year, have contributed to a rather broad understanding of art. Among other features, the students touched on technology, techniques, creation, creativity, exploration of ideas, expression of identity, and expression of culture as key components of art. In addition to actually learning about the process of designing; creating; and manipulating a puppet, students also entered into the research with some interesting ideas about what they might learn from engaging with puppetry. Betty3 wrote, “I will learn more about myself and my preferences.” Ryan thought he might “research about people and their attitudes.” Susan thought the puppet might become a friend who could be fun and interesting to communicate with and through. June suggested, “By making the puppet I might realize I have my own personality and what I make is not wrong but is only my own creativity.”

Upon reading the students’ responses, I began to question my rationale in asking this question. The journal entries were designed to give me insight into what students believed art could teach them. At the time I assigned the journal entry, I had hoped to clarify for myself what was made possible by art. If I want to keep minds (my own and those of the students) open to the possibility of such a project, however, perhaps such a question focuses too much on preconceived notions (especially my preconceived notions)

3 All children’s names are pseudonyms.
about what we will learn. We could have viewed the students’ journal responses to “What might you learn from puppetry?” as hypotheses that they could have reflected on later, but as I became increasingly focused on my teaching practice, the big picture of the research became obscured. Perhaps, I now think, reflection in art may be more relevant once creators have begun engaging in the art making process. I remember that learning is a cycle (see appendices B, C, and D): we ask a question, inquire into possible answers, and generate new questions. Our understandings are ever changing through praxis, a process of reflection and practice. Which comes first? Who knows?

The next set of data is comprised of a growing series of images I created and on which I have been reflecting ever since. These images are visual representations of pedagogical metaphors rendered in permanent fine tipped pen and watercolour. The first in the series expresses, illustrates, and illuminates “The Empty Vessel Metaphor” of education (see appendix A). Together with the class I interpreted the image, extending each aspect of the image out into the reality of educational systems. Who is the teapot? Who is the cup? Who is the hand holding the teapot? What happens to the teapot as it pours? What happens to the tea? What happens in the cup? The students immediately knew that this metaphor did not represent their understanding or experience with learning. They were not passive receptacles; they had their own thoughts and ideas to share; their teacher valued what they thought and felt.

I presented a second, reworked visual metaphor. This one was “Teacher as Scientist” (see appendix E). In it, the chemicals mix together in various combinations and quantities; the results are not known in advance. Many factors influence the reaction. Ultimately, however, the scientist controls who is mixing with whom, when, and how. In
some respects this metaphor speaks to the impact teachers have in choosing their pedagogical style and curriculum. Students are to some degree at the whim of their teacher. However, this was not the educational paradigm that the students wanted to live or I wanted to create. I continued searching for a more appropriate or inspiring educational metaphor.

A third metaphor shows a plant tied gently to a stake (see illustration F). I felt connected to this metaphor that allows youth to see their own light source with only gentle guidance and acknowledges that each student is unique and many factors other than their teacher influence their growth. Still, the relationship seems to represent a one-directional relationship, with students being influenced by teachers who simply maintain firm ground and are unchanging and unchanged by the students. Thus I gravitate now toward the three sisters of Native American agriculture: corn, beans, and squash. In this triune the corn serves as a support for the beans that grow up their stalks (see appendix G). The beans, in return, provide nitrogen-fixing bacteria that thrive on the sugars of the corn roots and fortify the soil. The squash (democratic teaching practices) protects the ground between the corn, conserving moisture in the soil and limiting the growth of weeds.

Using Metaphors in Teaching and Learning

The theory that most strongly guided my work with metaphors was derived from the work of Lakoff and Johnson (1980). From this work I understand that metaphors serve as lenses that help us understand our realities and actually create those realities. That is, they create the meaning that we perceive as reality. Thus, if we create our own reality and our own meaning we have the power to change the meaning of our realities.
By giving students an opportunity to consider the metaphors they use to understand themselves within personal challenges, they would also be able to see the impact those metaphors had on their thoughts and actions and perhaps, through metaphor, consider new understandings of themselves and their challenges. This theory competed in my mind with many other conceptions of art for personal growth, often diverting my attention toward other related interests, such as Compassionate Listening (Hoffman, Green, & Rivers, 2001), conflict resolution, and Theatre of the Oppressed (Boal, 2000). However, despite not having a clear conception of the significance or process of working with metaphor in this research at the beginning of the unit, I gravitated toward using visual metaphor as pedagogy for personal understanding and development.

Knowing that I wanted to explore the notion of shifting metaphor as a medium for transforming internal conflicts with the students, the challenge for me was how to help them determine what internal conflicts they experienced that they might explore through the process of this rather amorphous, possibly exposing project. I was apprehensive about what might come up, and perhaps even more so, that students would be reluctant to openly share significant personal challenges. I was also anxious about asking students to choose a challenge on which to focus for their puppetry project, because I was unsure how I would proceed once they had decided. Within the problem-solution paradigm they would have to achieve, or at least work toward, a solution. Students frequently set goals, but when they are asked to strive toward a goal by a teacher, it is usually a linear process that involves walking a narrow path from which one must not stray. It is difficult to generate enthusiasm for such a process where failure seems so likely, and relevancy is often lost for students. As MJ later explained, “when you say ‘goal’ they think, ‘Oh, I
have to write something for my report card,' or "It's New Years and I need to write a resolution," or "I want to get better at this 'cause that's what I've been told I need to get better at."...So think about instead of...giving them a frame, give them an opening."

I wanted to create an opening, but I could not envision it. If this project were not about seeking a new understanding rather than a solution, I could not foresee the end product or the process to reach it. For a traditionally trained teacher, this is a frightening prospect. In retrospect, I see the role that metaphors play in moving beyond the problem-solution paradigm. If we understand our challenges through metaphors, or as perspectives of our situation, investigating and extending the metaphor may help us understand the situation more deeply. We open up the possibility of a metaphoric shift, moving beyond goal attainment. Through a shift in perception, our relation to the situation, our thoughts, words, and interactions, will evolve as well.

Because I could not see beyond my goal-centred approach, I spent little time on sharing challenges and focused my classroom instruction more on metaphors. I found that many of the students initially created symbols rather than metaphors for their challenges, such as a moon with baggy eyes to represent lack of sleep. Immediately it became clear that all of the components of this assignment would have to be explored in much greater depth. What did I mean by "challenge"? How do we generate metaphors? What are we going to do with these metaphors once we have created them? All of these questions needed to be fleshed out and clarified. Thus I began the living process of developing this curriculum. I could now see that a metaphor was not simply a symbol in which an unlike thing, or signifier, represents a signified, but one in which the unique attributes of the signifier enlightens new insights of the signified. In common language:
these two things must be different enough that we have to work to find their similarities, and it is this work that helps us create significance and new meaning.

I began awkwardly to use Venn diagrams to help students draw out connections between two dissimilar things. It seemed the students were unsure of what I was asking them to do or why. Some students had nothing written in one or more section of their diagrams. At times the diagrams were not completed correctly, with shared descriptors written in each circle, or dissimilar things written in the overlapping centre. Thus a comparison between "my heart" and a "tree", for example, listed "red same colour"; one student compared eyes to a piece of paper because they were both white; and the relationship between "my eyes" and "a lion" was recorded by another student as "able to move anywhere". At first glance these metaphors seemed simply confusing to me. My initial analysis was that students had not understood. However, upon reflection, it becomes clear that by engaging more deeply with the metaphors, each one can generate new understandings. For example, one might imagine eyes darting around like a lion after prey. June, the same student who created this metaphor also explained that both her eyes and a lion "might roar with rage", a very potent image.

Although I had believed that breaking down metaphors using a formulaic process would help students, I later saw that this process was so linear that for some it became limiting. By reflecting on the experience and the data I gained a stronger understanding of metaphors as lenses through which we perceive ourselves. Through metaphor we open up possibilities to alter or shift our perspectives and are able to perceive through a new lens, offering new ways of being, acting and interacting. In order for this to happen, however, I felt the students needed to become more conscious of the implications of their
metaphors, to ask questions about how their metaphors are part of conceptual frameworks manifested in how they think, speak, and act.

While I grew increasingly concerned about my ability to help students use metaphor to transform their understandings of their challenges, I noticed that students displayed a high comfort level with metaphoric language, noting the use of metaphor within their novel study, Zach (Bell, 1998), and using visual and written metaphor in their reading responses. The story follows Zach, a Canadian teenage boy with a black mother and a white, Jewish father, as he journeys literally and figuratively to understand his past and his identity. In response to the passage in the novel in which the reader finds out that Zach’s mother withholds information from him about her family, Bailey’s drawing illustrated a family photograph in which Zach’s mom’s family is torn out and thrown in the trash. I noted that metaphors are so prevalent in the way we understand the world that we may not always notice when we think and speak in them.

Nearly half the students reflected on the metaphor in Zach, Chapter 9, in which Zach’s mother compares Zach to a tree with two strong roots in their drawn or written responses. Several students specifically commented on their transfer of knowledge between disciplines. June wrote in response, “Stacy is going to use that metaphor! How cool, Zach having 2 roots of his family tree. I have 2 too but in the end they’ll somehow connect, because both my parents are Chinese.” The students related the metaphor to their own lives, but they also acknowledged that the picture Zach’s mother was painting of Zach’s life was not entirely honest. Betty noted, “I like how the author used the metaphor for Zach and the oak tree with two big strong roots. But, Zach’s mom cuts him off of one of his ‘roots’ and like a tree, it can’t be healthy. If a tree is cut off of one of it’s
(sic) main roots, the tree will surely die.” Several of the students’ drawn responses reflected a similar extension of the visual metaphor. For example, Miranda’s drawing shows a skeptical-looking Zach with his mom looking at a tree with two roots: one long, white root with many branches, and one very short black root. Emily’s drawing showed a tree that is half black and half white falling over as the black root comes out of the ground. In bold block letters Emily has warned, “TIMBER!”

**Illustration 4.1 Samples from Zach responses: Tree metaphors**

*4.1a Rose*

![Image of Zach's drawing: a tree with a black side and a long white side.]

*I drew a tree with a black side and a long white side because the tree is Zack and he didn’t know much about his black side but a lot about his white side.*

*Chapter Nine*

*4.1b Emily*

![Image of Emily's drawing: a tree with a black side and a white side.]

*I think that Zack’s mom has something she doesn’t want Zack to know. Like about Zack’s black side of the family. I also think she’s trying to protect Zack from someone.*
Samples from Zach responses: Tree metaphors, cont...

4.1c Nick

When I saw that Zach's mother mentioned that
Zach is like a tree with two roots helping
him stand, it reminded me of Art class when they
saw me thinking about visual metaphors. What
I was told happened was that Zach and his dad
had a discussion about the tree. He had
gotten for his mother. I thought that it
is good to have conversations with your
dad about things that better you.

4.1d Lee

Maybe Zach has a third root.
He could have another one
meaning being a Jewish person.
I think the tree is like a family tree
because it tells about Zach's family
and himself; It represents them.

4.1e Juan

I drew Zack as a
tree with two roots
but one root broke
of representing his
black side because
he doesn't know much
about them.
To avoid being too obvious or harping on their observations, I did not spend a significant amount of time reflecting on the student’s drawings with the class. Here, however, I believe I missed an opportunity to have students extend a metaphor to which they felt a personal connection and a shared understanding. We may have engaged with the parts of the metaphor that many students had already mentioned such as the number and condition of the tree’s roots or the significance of the soil, trunk, branches, and leaves. We may have also considered what the tree would need to survive and how those conditions might be interpreted in Zach’s life. The students might have even created metaphors of their own histories as trees. Had I helped the students see the connection between the study of metaphor and other learning, this experience may have strengthened their understanding of, and ability to utilize, arts-based inquiry.

Instead, I attempted to express to the class the how and why of metaphors within the context of this unit, and it seemed I was still not quite clear. I spent a great deal of time in reflection, searching for ways that we could practice identify commonalities between the signified and signifier:

- by appearance (colour, size, shape, etc...)
- by some other sensual similarity (sound, smell, taste, feel...)
- by function (what they both do or are used for)
- by parts/components of the whole (composition)
- by emotional impact (they both make you feel the same way)
- by condition (emotional or physical state)

However, this emphasis on process had taken some of the art out of metaphor and tried to make it a science, which it is not.

The following day I attempted to take a different approach to metaphor by leading students through a visualization and beginning with image rather than with words. I asked them to be specific about the details of the image in their minds. For example, if
you are like a tree, is it a strong tree or one that is about to be blown over by the wind? I told them they would not have to find the words to talk about this image at this time, but simply find an image that represented them or how they felt. When they felt ready I had them date the next page in their journals and begin to draw.

A strength I found in this exercise is that it removed the pressure of finding the right words or image. The image that appeared in each student's mind was the right image. A weakness was that I devalued what they had created by not encouraging students to pursue this image in their inquiries. The actions of the teacher can either affirm or diminish students' confidence in their work. Luckily, this class has a great deal of confidence overall; however, by not following through on the ideas that this exercise generated, I am afraid that I negatively affected students' confidence in and commitment to learning from this inquiry. This exercise did generate some intriguing images. There was, for example, Betty's water droplet creating a ripple effect, Nick's snowflakes blown by "a fierce force of wind", Susan's car full of energy, and June's pencil without an eraser that can always be sharpened to write more but can never remove what she has written. One direction we could have taken once students had generated these visual metaphors is for the students to work together to extend the images back into their lives. By asking themselves and one another questions about how this image might play metaphorically into their understandings of themselves and their challenges, the connection between personal inquiry and metaphor would be strengthened. What this exercise could have demonstrated is that we create the meaning in our metaphors as well as in our lives; many metaphors and many perspectives are possible and therefore each individual may use his or her agency to engage a different metaphor and new meaning.
In order to guide students to ask questions about their tablemates’ images, I took them through some questions designed to strengthen and clarify metaphors. For example, I asked students to consider what the parts of the rose might represent if a rose is a metaphor for your heart. Emma, who used the rose metaphor to view her heart, explained, “I thought my thorns were protecting the heart.” I should have asked Emma to translate the parts of the rose further into her life. I could have asked, for example, “How would having ‘thorns’ around your heart affect your relationships with others?” I could also have encouraged her classmates to ask further questions of Emma, as ultimately I had hoped this work could be an opportunity for students to support one another.

My uncertainty about how to guide others through extension of metaphor made me reluctant to continue with this line of inquiry. I simply could not see the next step from where I was within the process. Directing them to extend their metaphors seemed at the time to only confuse the students, so I chose a different approach to this inquiry. Perhaps, however, they simply needed to be provided an opportunity to freely explore the significance of their metaphors within their lives without the imposition of my or others’ ideas. By shifting gears, I unintentionally conveyed doubt in their choices of direction.

The Goal Setting Approach

The following day, I began to explore a different approach to this project. Rather than continuing with metaphor and interpreting its impact on life, I decided to spend more time helping students identify the challenge that they would like to explore through this inquiry. On MJ’s recommendation, I designed exercises to give students an opportunity to begin working directly with puppets. She felt it was important for the
students to have opportunities to manipulate materials if they were to see the connections between making art and inquiry. We had spent too much time in the puppetry unit without any opportunities to work with puppets. MJ suggested that the students might create puppets from familiar characters such as those from fairy tales or a prior novel study. She felt that playing with puppets might help students engage a bit more and gain more interest in puppets. I decided the students would create puppets based on their novel study, *Harris & Me* (Paulsen, 1993), but I was unsure of what to do with them. MJ encouraged me to just provide an opportunity to play. I cringe to think of it, but the students did not get to play. Instead, I led them through a highly structured, but pedagogically ungrounded series of dramatic and written exercises attempting in a somewhat convoluted way to make connections between setting and puppetry.

Through drama and reflective journal entries, I strived to guide the students to consider the variety of personal goals that the character they had chosen might have. The journal assignments were formulaic, asking students to list these physical, emotional, and social goals. Through drama exercises I attempted to get the students inside the heads of the characters. These exercises were a bit more open, but I was still not completely clear on
the objectives and so we all struggled through them. I had hoped that considering the various kinds of goals that individuals set to care for themselves and the world would guide them to focus on aspects of their lives that were personally meaningful. I had also hoped that through this work the students would understand that we only have the power to transform ourselves, and that conflicting pressures can create internal conflicts about goals. I see however, that I was making the assumption that the challenges they described were not personally meaningful. I was saying that I valued their ideas and experiences, but acting as if they needed to reach some “right” conclusion. Thus, the general frustration level rose. In recorded group conversations, Ryan expressed that he didn’t really like metaphors and Lee concurred. To them this work was not fun and did not make sense. Lee, “I think we should do more drama and learn metaphors along the way.”

Unfortunately, it seems, Ryan had already disengaged. He never completed his puppet. This filled me with a great sense of failure as an educator. I have come to understand that I was trying to force an open-ended arts-based inquiry into the linear construct of goal setting. The result was that the unit became more teacher-directed than student-centred, and students’ investment, as well as my own, in the project continued to diminish.
I wonder now if investment in this inquiry would have been higher if I had followed through with the initial visual metaphors that students generated through their visualizations. Would they have naturally been interpreted through the areas of students' lives that they felt were most significant? As I began reviewing students' journals, I became disappointed in myself, believing that I had lost time by taking what appeared in retrospect to be an unproductive tangent. However, upon further reflection I see that this idea of losing time is another metaphor that I live by. It is this metaphor that allows me to believe that time is a commodity (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980, p. 8) rather than a process, that each moment in the past is spent and gone. We might rather conceive of time as lessons that teach us new ideas and skills. In this metaphor, the more time we have, the more understanding we actually receive. By changing my conception of time and of the use of time, I have gained new perspective and new perceptions. I am able to see that these experiences actually taught me what this unit is about by showing me what it is not. I learned the difference between goal setting and using art to find possibility within challenge. This inquiry is about the latter.

**Students' challenges**

Ultimately, at some point I determined that the students understood enough to choose a challenge on which to focus. In retrospect, it seems silly now that they would have needed much preface at all to choose a challenge they face in their own lives, perhaps just a little bit of time to think quietly and maybe to journal freely. At this point I had conceived in my mind the metaphor of myself as a skier hoping to land on my feet, but knowing that I will enjoy the ride either way. Once I could see not only my challenge, but also what appeared to be a new way of thinking about my challenge,
through a metaphor, I felt more confident in engaging the students in this process. By sharing my example, I felt that they might better perceive their own directions. I recognized that my example and much of the previous process had manipulated students’ thinking about what a challenge could be. Although I was sincere when I said that they could choose any challenge that was significant to them, they had suggested enough answers that I had not accepted to conclude that their own ideas were wrong. I had not created an opening for free expression or inquiry of dangerous ideas. Thus, I believe many of the students stuck to safe topics, ones which adults would like children to address: their academics, their relationships with family members, or their ability to manage their emotions. Anger came up quite a bit in students’ writing. As MJ explained, this is because anger is acceptable to talk about in school, as opposed to sex, for example, which is perhaps a more pressing issue for youth this age, but less acceptable to discuss at school.

I recognized the truth in MJ’s observation. Discussing societal pressures later on in the unit, I mentioned the pressure from the media to be “sexy”. The students giggled profusely; I shied away from the topic. I recognized my own fear of addressing the topics that seemed taboo and yet were likely to be the most relevant to youth in early adolescence. I am critical of the shortcomings where education has failed thus far to effectively teach youth about sexuality and respect and I believe that this should be a priority in education today; however, not having had this work modeled for me combined with my own shyness has made me somewhat reluctant to bring such topics up on my own. At the same time, however, I was somewhat disappointed that the challenges students generated seemed so mundane. Identifying my hypocrisies and allowing myself
to struggle internally with my own inconsistencies allows me to innovate and create new possibilities. So it is for us all. This is the possibility I had hoped to explore with the students, but it has taken me until now to express it so plainly.

I must now acknowledge that the challenges that the students raised are truly relevant and pressing issues in their lives. They dealt with everything from insecurity to academic honesty, and many of the challenges deeply reflected internal conflicts, without that being a specific requirement. Because of the vagueness of and confusion surrounding my directions not all of the students chose to address internal conflicts, but even challenges that appear to be very external have internal components into which we might inquire more deeply. For example, the belief of some of the students that their challenges would be solved if only they would work harder, reflect the messages taught by community and media that you can go straight from point A to point B if you simply try hard enough. However, even the students who inquired into the challenge of not getting good grades can inquire into the value of grades versus other values, what they believe about themselves academically, and where these beliefs come from. Who values good grades? Why? Who determines what is a good grade? Who determines what is gradable? What does it say about you that you don’t have good grades? What do you believe about yourself as a result? Ultimately, the answers and questions lead us to an internal conflict. Perhaps the conflict is that achievement is harder for you than it seems to be for others and so you feel inferior. Perhaps you love playing music and feel that that is where you would like to put your energy, but other pressures encourage you to succeed more in math. Perhaps some concerns or stresses in your life seem more pressing than school work, even though you believe that down the line it may be
important for you to be able to focus on academics. In a goal-setting orientation or a problem-solution paradigm, the process appears to be linear: focus and study hard and you will get good grades in school. Life, however, is not this simple. Helping students really understand their personal issues and giving them opportunities to understand themselves allows them to formulate new conceptions of themselves and imagine possibilities that are not available within “Focus and study hard and you will get good grades in school.”

**Student Analysis of Challenges**

After reading and reflecting on students’ challenges, I presented each table group of students with a list of the class’s challenges cut individually into strips. Each group worked collaboratively to group the challenges by themes. The majority of the themes students generated dealt with who or what was engaged in the challenge. Many of the groups included a category about relationship-related conflicts (friends or family). While challenges within each category have the potential for great diversity, in the case of this class, many family conflicts were quite similar. The most common challenge documented by the class was dealing with an annoying younger sibling. However, if we look at the specifics of each situation, it becomes clear that this challenge’s impact on each student and the way in which it is perceived varies from student to student. To some students the sibling was considered the problem and the challenge was simply making him or her go away. To other students the challenge was being able to get along with the sibling. In Miranda’s words, it was “getting along with my brother without always letting him have his way.” It was not always the sibling that was the challenge; many students recognized that the challenge was within them, in the way in which they responded when
they were irritated, or perhaps the fact that they were so easily irritated to begin with. Samantha’s conflict was fighting with her parents, but she stated her challenge as “listening to my parents so we don’t fight so much.”

Many of the table groups also identified “school” or “grades” as a theme. Academic challenges ranged from procrastination to struggling with academics. Betty’s challenge was the most specific. She struggled with always erasing work that she did not think was good enough. When broken down and analyzed, many of these challenges seem to be related to self-confidence, another theme students identified. Interestingly, only those challenges that used words specifically alluding to feelings or emotions were classified as related to self-confidence. “Wanting to be a shining star” appeared in a category called “Inner Thoughts” in one group, “Emotional Problems” in another group, “Yourself” in a third group, and simply “Other” in a fourth group. When words suggesting context (family, friends, school, etc…) were given, students gravitated toward classifying the challenge by this context. However, when the context was not given, the students were more inclined to focus on the internal conflict underlying the challenge.

The list of underlying internal challenges listed as themes included, “Fear”, “Distractions” or “Concentration”, “Self Confidence/Attitude”, and “Anger”. Thus, the students did often recognize that “getting upset when I don’t understand my homework” was not simply about success, and was as much about attitude as “Staying positive when upsetting things happen”. It may appear that the struggle is outside the individual (ie. Between the individual and her homework or the individual and her brother), but often with reflection we see that the struggle is in how to understand or confront the challenge. Perhaps this is the difference between a problem and a challenge.
I asked the students to consider what the difference is between a problem and a challenge and which of the two described the situations into which they were inquiring. Most of the students did not want to admit to having a “problem”. They giggled as they asked each other jokingly, “What’s your problem?!?” They recognized the negative connotations, but were also able to extend them to consider how they approach difficult situations. To Ryan, challenges were simply everyday occurrences. He wrote that “it’s just the way life goes and you have to face the challenge.” June wrote, “I want to call my idea a challenge because it’s not really important and I can live without fixing it but I think my life will be easier if I did something about my challenge instead of leaving it.” Although she diminished the significance of her own struggles, she supported the notion that we, as individuals, have the power to choose of how we conceive our experiences. They are not inherently “problems” or “difficult”; this is simply the meaning with which we imbue them.

Most of the students agreed that in a challenge there was a possibility of transcendence. To Emily, “a problem seems more like something that cannot be fixed. A challenge is more of something that is difficult to work through.” This delineation moved beyond the notion that there is something wrong with us that needs to be fixed. Instead we see challenges as something that we must work through and be in. Rose expressed that she had been working at her challenge (avoiding distractions) for a long time and was finding herself improving. She understood that challenges are not simply linear, short-term situations, but constant growing experiences. Susan, on the other hand, saw herself as experiencing a problem, “because it is very natural and I don’t think I would be able to change it.” She continued, “I don’t think of mine as a challenge that
much because I can’t help myself from doing it.” While Susan seemed to believe the situation was out of her control, her response still supported the notion that the possibility for change lies within us as individuals. She did not see possibility for herself being able to stop yelling at her brother, but it seemed fairly clear that she had accepted that the problem was internal; she did not fault her brother. She seemed to desire the ability to transform herself and the situation, but did not know how to do so. I believe that this is a learned response and wonder where Susan learned that anger is the natural reaction.

The insights provided by the students could have been taken much further had I left more opportunities for students to reflect freely on their personal inquiries and on the class’s process in this unit. I needed to accept that this process of reflection and action was one I too was learning and to allow for reflections that might lead us in a direction for which I may not have been able to plan. In the future I would create more opportunities for students to share their interpretations of their experiences in inquiry process and to give feedback throughout the process.

Creation of puppets
I possess limited record of the puppet-making process. The majority of the data are photographs of the puppets at various stages of completion. I had hoped that the actual process of manipulating materials and seeing the puppets evolve would generate more discussion around the students’ challenges. Mostly during studio time they became quite silly. Throughout the confusion of the earlier stages of this project I think that an atmosphere developed in which this work was not taken very seriously. These students are overwhelmingly focused and hard working and I was disappointed that I had not succeeded in fostering an atmosphere of respect, curiosity, and discovery. The students
stopped speaking about their challenges as soon as they started working on their puppets. I recognize that although I encouraged them to continue reflecting on their challenges with their tablemates, even I was grateful at the time for a break from so much talking. I felt it would be helpful to allow the subconscious to work as the hands did. However, this time did not serve well as reflection time. Instead students chatted about everything but their inquiries and many of the students demeaned their own creations. Although I can see now how much pressure I was placing on students figuring out an answer, at the time I felt sad to see the students not seem to take their work seriously and I found that I was losing enthusiasm for the process. It was only with great effort that I could reflect positively on the students' work, and I am certain that they sensed this.

It made sense that the students would judge their work harshly if I did. I recognize now that in this process I missed much of what students were learning, as I did not provide time for them to reflect freely. In fact, I dropped journaling completely during the studio time as I could not think of a structured journal topic for them and I felt pressured by time to simply finish the puppets. By valuing journaling only as it related to my ideas, rather than as it related to the students' thoughts and experiences, the overall value of the project diminished for the students. If I had allowed them to reflect privately on their process, perhaps the learning would have been different. Alas, the part of this unit that dealt directly with puppets, their creation and their manipulation, was left until the end and quite rushed. Like many of the students, I was too critical of the work as it was in process, both the work of the puppets and the work of the inquiry.

Early in the artistic process, the puppets generally looked the same. They were simply hints of the beings that would evolve from them. While this can be a frustrating
or even defeating stage in studio work, metaphorically speaking this stage holds the most promise for understanding challenge. We may not be able to see any hint of resolution at the early stages of a process; however, by virtue of having embarked on the journey, of taking the first step and committing to finding the next, we open up possibilities.

Obviously artistic creations, like challenges, require time and commitment in order to make progress. Had we spoken more about creative processes, perhaps some of the pressure of the artistic product would have been alleviated. As it was, there was quite a bit of pressure to complete the puppets on time. I was unsure of what students getting from the experience and their learning to the class. My desire to see the whole picture, the end result, while I was as students’ desire to see fixed. Often, however, you cannot see a finished product until it is finished. Work evolves through process; this is living inquiry. Because I did not feel that I was inspiring the students, I tended to see myself as a failure. Again, this is a metaphor that informed my living.

It was as if I saw the research as an exam, testing my competency as an educator and an academic, rather than as a learning experience. When things did not go as I had hoped or imagined,
rather than understanding it as a learning experience, the process passed judgment on me, evaluating my work like an exam. The pressure to succeed was too high; I was basing my career, my self-worth, on it! If the research was an exam; the thesis; the defense, then there was the possibility that the results could condemn me. If the research was inquiry, then I could only learn, only grow. I could embark on a journey without knowing for certain where I would end up. I chose the latter interpretation. How often does education become an examination? When success and failure become the only two possibilities in learning, both teacher and students are limited. I became determined to break free of this binary and find another way of being

Description of puppet metaphors
Once students had settled on a challenge to investigate, they represented themselves within that challenge with relative ease. Although I did not require students to represent themselves metaphorically, I strongly encouraged them to do so, and the majority of the students did. The metaphors included plants, animals, a star, an extraterrestrial, fantasy creatures, and three two-headed individuals. Some students used the metaphor to represent themselves as they currently are within their challenges. For example, Samantha’s alien parents seemingly spoke a different language and could never understand anything she said. Abdalla’s tiger was fierce, as Abdalla himself saw himself to be when responding to his younger brother. For others, the metaphor allowed them to conceive of their ideal, such as Mark’s shooting star, desiring to stand out amongst his classmates.

While several students found inspiration in the two-headed metaphor, Nick’s use of this “schizophrenic” metaphor, literally “split mind”, reflected the struggle between
Illustration 4.2 Samantha’s alien puppet

Illustration 4.3 Mark’s shooting star puppet

Illus. 4.4 Nick’s two-headed boy puppet Illus. 4.5 Drawing for Rose’s horse with blinders
the ideal and the real, how we would like to be versus how we are. Nick's two-headed boy's insecure mind held him back even as his confident mind knew he was capable. While the scenario that Nick shared was specific to his highly academic focus in life (worrying about passing an exam), ultimately his metaphor reflected less on his desire to succeed academically than it did to simply be okay with himself. I enjoyed seeing the development of these metaphors and the students' thinking about themselves in their journals, as their struggles resonated with me. I found myself imagining putting on blinders like Rose's horse puppet, as I attempted to focus on my research amidst other distractions of life.

Some of the metaphors were less straightforward, but no less intriguing. Susan, frustrated by her own anger toward her brother, represented herself as a bear. The bear, she explained, she would like to brother. I believe the bear as bear, as opposed to However, I am brother sees in her she sees within This might have observation for extended her

Illustration 4.6 Susan's bear puppet
do not believe that it was a perception anyone shared with her at the time. I only began to understand this metaphor after the completion of the unit. While my ex post facto reflections bereft of the students' confirmation or denial may run the risk of misinterpretation, I believe that metaphors lend themselves to multiple interpretations, and the interpretations of others are often surprisingly relevant.

**Preparing for presentations**

With just a week separating us from the puppet presentations, puppets went home with students to be finished, and most of them returned to the classroom complete. In my anxiety about the conclusion of the projects, I fell back on the structured language and procedure of goal setting paradigm. I wished that this work had opened up a new way of perceiving life and life’s challenges, but I did not feel that this was the case. I was asking students to share through their puppets what they had learned, but was not convinced that this would be possible. My fear was that some students would not know what to share because they had not learned anything new, thus creating greater pressure and stress. I was determined to help them find a new perspective. Having lost faith in the work of the metaphors, I returned to a focus I had originally intended to pursue but had not.

Early in the research I was interested in exploring how new insights into internal conflicts could be generated through inquiry into the multiple and often conflicting messages we receive about who we are and how we should be. By looking at popular fiction, film, and television we might consider some of the challenges faced by the students and the ways in which they were presented in various media. Due to time constraints, we were only able to skim the surface of this large issue, but at least we would be able to ask the question, “Where do these messages come from and what do
they tell you?” Students recognized that the strongest messages came from family, friends, school, and media (television, books, and movies). June explained her family’s responses to her distractions from her homework, “My family just tells me to do my homework and if I’m watching T.V. my sister always blocks my view so I guess that helps and whenever I get more than 3 phone calls my parents tell them not to phone again.” Certainly the messages from her parents (Just do your homework!) conflict with the messages from her friends (Talk to me!) and TV (Watch me!). It is possible that her parents or sister may also send conflicting messages. Is the homework more important than TV? Are other family members watching TV? When does TV come before other family members’ responsibilities? These questions remained unasked, but they show us that the messages are not always so straightforward. Sometimes messages are hidden so that we do not even realize that we are receiving them.

Some students also included their religion and simply “myself” in their lists. Jake explained, “I get my messages from inside me. I think some people think that this is really strange and crazy. I get my messages from this tiny little voice that is inside me....” Jake hit upon one of the key concepts of work in personal development: There will always be outside pressures, but ultimately the person who has to make the decision and live with the consequences is you. It is important to explore this voice and what it has to tell us. Most often the voice is made up of a virtual symphony of little voices: a parent, a sibling, a friend, a TV character, all who have become a part of our thinking and beliefs. We are not this conglomeration of voices. We would not call ourselves stupid or lazy or ugly if we had the choice, still the voice expresses such sentiments. Perhaps.
however, we have the power to conduct the voices, to make some more forte and others more piano (soft).

I reflected that I wished we had addressed societal messages earlier in the unit, so that we could have spent time exploring these ideas through the puppets: considering the impact different messages have, how they conflict, and which ones win out. It is important to acknowledge that we all have inconsistencies. Parents and the media are not the only ones sending mixed messages; we all send ourselves mixed messages, as well. We say and believe one thing and are still able to do the opposite. By addressing our own hypocrisies we see new possibilities. Had we considered the diversity of social messages early as students were first considering their challenges and conceiving of their puppets, perhaps we would have been able to engage in a second round of inquiry in which the puppets, understanding the complexity of their subjective perspectives, might attempt to create new possibilities for themselves. These possibilities could be reflected in the students' own lives, through ways of thinking, speaking, or acting. The puppet metaphors might begin to shift or change either in relation to the puppet's behaviour, location, interactions, state or qualities. For example, the couch potato might decide to lie down in the dirt, take plenty of water, and just relax. He may be surprised to find that what he perceived as laziness causes him to grow! The artist/student's work would be to determine the relationship between such a perceptual shift in his puppet and his life.

Exploratory puppet time would also give students opportunities to practice manipulating the puppet and telling the puppet's story in first person.

The students and I did not have time to engage in a second cycle of the research; instead, we moved ahead to prepare for the puppet presentations. However, the
metaphoric inquiry would continue with or without my instruction. A few days before the puppet presentations, Betty approached me to tell me about her process and its metaphoric manifestation. Betty was challenged by her perfectionism because it caused her to focus on the things that were not very significant, such as handwriting, rather than seeing the big picture. She represented herself within this challenge as a bunny, seeing bunnies as “shy and seemingly helpless,” as she described herself in relationship to her ability to affect change in herself. She explained to me that as she painted the bunny’s face, she noticed that the eyes were asymmetrical. While she wanted to fix her paint job, she felt that this would be giving in to her perfectionist tendencies. By accepting the bunny as it was, she was able to find resolve in relation to her challenge and to focus her energy instead on the next step, which was conceiving of her presentation.

We spent one abbreviated period (approximately 30 minutes) improvising with the puppets. The purpose of this exercise was two-fold: 1) It would provide students with some time to practice manipulating the puppets and 2) It would provide an opportunity for students to consider and practice what the puppet might share. As was arranged in advance, MJ taught the lesson I had prepared, giving students concise directions on what they should be doing (finding a partner, having your puppet share his or her story, getting advice from the other puppet, switching roles, and then finding another partner until you have shared with three different puppets). MJ had ensured through her directions that they would find partners with whom they did not usually work and that no one would be left out. It was a key tenet of the classroom to include and respect everyone. When this did not occur, it was always pointed out and the students were very attuned to this. Thus I saw students who were often by themselves at lunchtime being included, sharing, and
smiling. When they sat down and reflected on what they had learned from other puppets it was profound.

The students *crave* outside perspective. The classroom reflects the world: People are isolated and if we do not reach out we think we are alone. The students all reached out and gained new insights into themselves and their challenges. Some learned new ways of being. One student who had initially felt his problem was his annoying younger sibling suddenly expressed that instead of trying to hurt her he might actually talk to her. Jake, the boy who represented himself as a couch potato because he thought he was too lazy, shared, “The advice I got was to listen, pay attention, and to do outside activities more. I got that advice from a nice dragon and a yellow star. I think the advice will be really helpful.” Although paying attention is sometimes easier said than done, the suggestion “to do outside activities more” might speak to the possibility of shifting his attention from the things that do not inspire action in him, toward those that do. Perhaps being lazy is not a personality trait, but simply a temporary condition. Taylor shared that she “got information on how to deal with [her] anger from other puppets.” These puppets suggested that she spend quiet time by herself, but Taylor had different ideas about how to deal with her own anger. She reflected, “I would like to dance and I do and it works really good too.” At times hearing others’ advice that we do not feel is right for us helps reaffirm what we already know about how we work as individuals.

**Presenting**

All of the students were required to present, despite level of completion. I was pleased that there is a general expectation of inclusion within the classroom and the students were generally accepting of and prepared for this requirement. At least those
who were not prepared still presented without much reluctance. They have had a great
deal of practice talking in front of their classmates and I emphasized that any type of
presentation was acceptable. I believe that this alleviated some of the anxiety and some
students even expressed relief. They had spent some time in class sharing ideas with
friends, casting other puppets in their plays, and some students rehearsed with their cast
of puppets, improvising around a general story. Betty even wrote a script with several
scenes that she rehearsed over the weekend.

The first presentation set the scene for a feeling of levity and fun. Robert
volunteered to be the first to present, bringing along other puppets and puppeteers to
share his mostly improvised presentation. The students giggled at Robert’s monkey
puppet falling from a tree. The
Robert, who tends to
comedian, a monkey,
silly things, was new
difficult for his peers
giggling. After this
suggested that we often
see something familiar,
uncomfortable that we
within us. I asked the
saw anything within
was familiar to them.

Illustration 4.7 Robert’s monkey puppet

Some of the students related to the monkey’s desire not to get back up again once he had
fallen. I asked them to consider other things they might not have wanted to do again if their first try had not gone as well as expected. After suggesting personal scenarios I asked them to consider what had happened in the play that helped the monkey get back up again and what kind of encouragement they had received in their own lives that helped them face their fears. Overwhelmingly the students could relate to this scenario and expressed as much in their feedback to Robert. The students were noticeably quieter and more focused during the following presentations.

There was a great deal of diversity in the approaches to presentations. Some students represented themselves or their situations literally, acting out their challenge as they had actually experienced them, or exploring a possible resolution. Some of the students simply rather than acting it out. Devon, who began, represented himself as a puppy, brother’s attention, annoying. While his on the stage, it Devon narrated his story about how he used to annoy his brother but does not any more. Perhaps narrate the story

Illustration 4.8 Devon’s puppy puppet

longer sees himself within that metaphor. Many students took the opportunity to extend
their metaphors through their presentations. Jake’s couch potato puppet, for example, nearly “baked” himself in a house fire due to his own laziness. Another approach was to represent oneself as human but create a metaphoric condition or scenario through one’s play. Mackenzie’s puppet, for example, was a girl who appeared to be a literal interpretation of Mackenzie. However, when she presented her puppet’s challenge to the class, the puppet was a prisoner, locked away and heavily guarded.

Illustration 4.9 Mackenzie’s prisoner puppet

I am afraid that those who chose not to represent themselves metaphorically may have felt left out, or felt somehow less successful. These students had met the requirements of the assignment as I had presented it, but perhaps I should have required that the students represent themselves metaphorically, as metaphor was such a strong focus of the inquiry. I noticed that some of these students had difficulty engaging. Causality is difficult to attribute in this situation: some of these students may simply have
had difficulty understanding metaphors or the use of metaphors as I had presented it, or been uninterested for other reasons, but others seemed to be engaged until the puppet-making process.

Dave seemed to have a hard time engaging early in the project, reflecting my experiences with him in the past. MJ had explained that he had very low confidence in his academic work because he had so often been told he is not smart. When pushed, however, his passion and creativity are apparent. Dave’s engagement diminished further as the project went on. He did not complete many of his journal assignments, perhaps confused or uninterested in the project. He never could express his challenge to me in words. I suspected this is because he was concerned about creating work that would be acceptable to me. Dave’s passion was hockey and so the could share publicly but I suspect he felt challenges were not other hand, internal struggling with academic subjects, too uncomfortable to of the presentations, completed paper no features and asked him if he was ready for his presentation and encouraged him to stay in during lunch.

Illustration 4.10 Dave’s puppet head Dave’s passion was struggles he felt he related to this sport, that these relevant. On the challenges, like confidence in may have seemed share. On the day he had a partially mâchéd head with minimal paint. MJ
to prepare. I had emphasized that there would be no wrong approach to the presentations, but that everyone would present. So Dave took to the stage with his puppet head perched on his fingertips in one hand, and John A. MacDonald speaking from a ten-dollar bill in the other. His solution to the presentation was quite creative, although the story line of the presentation moved directly from his desire to win a hockey championship to victory without much exploration of challenge.

June, on the other hand, had seemed very engaged early in the unit, writing the potent metaphor in which she described her eyes as a lion, able to “roar with rage”, yet chose not to represent her metaphorically. She did reflect in her journal that she had thought about creating a puppy puppet to represent her easy distractibility, but decided to stick with her idea drawing. In her tablemates early making process, tablemates mistook hair as an elephant’s teasing had an commitment to project. I can only unfortunately never However, it is clear chose to not complete Illustration 4.11 June’s puppet drawing that June

puppet never received a body and the painting on the head remained half-completed.
Was June resisting the rushed feeling of this artistic process? Was she apprehensive about her presentation? Did she simply feel uncommitted to this inquiry? I do not know what caused the shift, but as the in-class puppet-making process drew to a close and we began to prepare puppet sat in the puppet stand progressing. When to work on the after class or during them. When it came puppet still was an disembodied head. week she had my puppet will help and help me summon my puppet will help talk in front of the class. My puppet will talk about my problem and a solution and ask for some advice. I will...maybe talk to my puppet and see what my puppet thinks.” I had hoped the puppets would present interesting perspectives for one another, even for their creators, so I was intrigued that June saw possibility in this option. I was even more intrigued by the image of June talking to her incomplete puppet head. It might have been interesting for June to ask her incomplete June-puppet what she thought about this process and what the puppet thought about being left incomplete. I wonder if this would have inspired a new metaphor through which June might understand her challenge.
June’s puppet head, incomplete as it was, arrived on stage with June’s human head. Both were visible on stage as June absent-mindedly held her puppet head in her hand and discussed being distracted from her homework and what she thinks she can do about it. As in nearly all of the presentations, the students listened respectfully, clapped at the end, and returned to their seats to give June feedback.

Ryan, who also did not complete his puppet, did not arrive at school on the day of the presentations. MJ suggested that there might perhaps be some correlation between these two situations. As all students were expected to present, however, Ryan and his two disembodied makeshift stage. As pressure of being not having the diversity of assignment, Robert his own monkey Ryan in front of the and genuine desire to appreciated, and Ryan would find heads took the he faltered under the unprepared and of benefit of seeing the responses to this stood up, grabbed puppet and joined class. His kindness help were briefly it seemed that some direction.

Both students’ approach to pressure is to make light of it, however, and so the presentation became quite silly and lost focus. It was not clear through the presentation whether or not Ryan had actually ever chosen a challenge to address.
The dialogues between puppets did impact students’ presentations and their understandings of their challenges. Throughout this project Susan received some advice that may have helped her conceive of her plight differently. Another puppet suggested that she “somehow calm down so [she] could hear the problem [her] brother is having…instead of taking it out on [her] brother.” Interestingly, in Susan’s final presentation of her bear puppet, she tried on the possibility of apologizing for her rough behaviour toward her brother. In the puppet simulation, he forgave her and they hugged.

Perhaps because of my emphasis on goal setting early in the project, many of the students sought to represent conventionally acceptable approaches to dealing with challenges: ask a friend for suggestions and support, talk to an adult, speak calmly to the person with whom you are in conflict, focus. While these plans of action can be helpful, they are often easier said that done. Because they are generated by perceiving the situation as one always has, it is likely that their impact will be the same as it has always been. For example, Lee’s brother, the little monkey puppet, constantly bugs Derek, Lee’s puppet boy, to play with him. Derek asks his brother to stop and when that does not work, he tells his dad. His dad gently admonishes his brother and the brother apologizes. The presentation ends. We do not know if Lee actually believed that telling his dad or asking his brother to stop were viable options in responding to this challenge. What we do know is the reality Lee himself shared, “I asked him to stop but he kept doing it like he always does.” Much as we expect, the same old solution has the same old effect.

Other presentations shared similarly conventional plans of action that may have been quite different had students been encouraged to step outside of the box and into the metaphor. The “shooting star” got his friends to support him when he had to present a
report. Friends’ support may increase your confidence during the presentation, but is still not likely to make you feel that you have done outstanding work unless you actually believe that you have done outstanding work. Betsy’s horse asked for forgiveness for accidentally tripping in reality forgiveness easily granted, or so that matter. It is also feelings, and often surrounding an created conflict may an apology. By direct response to metaphoric realm, I possibilities will

Illustration 4.14 Betsy’s horse puppet another puppet, but is not always so easily asked for, for likely that the misunderstandings, incident that has not be addressed by moving beyond the conflict into a believe new emerge, perhaps ones

that were before inconceivable. Samantha, who represented herself as an alien, struggled to communicate with her parents who seem to always be fighting. The alien took the very mature route of speaking to her parents about how upset this made her. The path taken is bold for a child. Still it, was the response of a human child to her human parents, not an alien child to her human parents. The question remains to be considered: How would an alien child respond to this situation? Would she try to study her parent’s language? Would she teach them her own? Would she try to find a translator?

Upon deeper reflection, I noticed that some of the storylines that seemed quite linear in their path from problem to solution actually do not quite fit this mold. What is
unique about Samantha’s storyline is that despite her direct plan of action (talk to parents calmly) she does not find a solution, but rather reaches a new understanding. The parents explain that problems sometimes come up, but they are natural. Perhaps in the end this is a translation from parent language into alien language that helps make sense of the adult world for an adolescent. The solution that was hoped for and would perhaps be strived for (making her parents stop fighting) did not manifest, but perhaps a different sort of understanding was made possible.

Betty’s bunny puppet also reached a new understanding through her struggle to change her perfectionist tendencies by practicing acceptance of her somewhat allegorical presentation takes place in an enchanted school for animals in which the students have just been assigned to on ways to prevent endangered following excerpt scripted understanding of the nature of life’s challenges as perceived through the lens of her personal metaphor:

Illustration 4.15 Betty’s bunny puppet
Narrator: The bunny tried and tried to change herself and realized not long after that it was very difficult to cope with the challenge.

Bunny: (Popping up on stage.) Monstrous urge to redo work!

Narrator: Soon after, the bunny started to realize something which she told her friend about the next day.

(Dog and Bunny appear.)

Dog: So how are things going with your challenge? Have you had any improvements so far?

Bunny: Well, out that I cannot say that. Actually I found completely change now that try my best...

Betty seemed to pass through several stages as she reached represented in her presentation. perfectionism detracts from her on understanding the big began to put energy into not this point she experienced a and yet shared with me that lopsided bunny eyes. realized that she has of energy into avoiding as negative, rather than creating something positive. Here she accepted that all she can do is try her best.
While this understanding manifested itself as a sort of resignation, it may continue to evolve. Again, I wonder how the bunny might transform if we were to extend the metaphor, rather than simply anthropomorphizing the story. Would the meek bunny become bolder or more confident? Perhaps the metaphor would help Betty find a new lens through which to perceive both the bunny and herself. Could the bunny find delight in her speed or in her work rather than being critical of perceiving herself as "shy and seemingly helpless" in facing her challenge? How else could this metaphor be modified?

Although I was critical of my own work seeing the linear problem-solution paradigm manifest in many presentations, through reflection and analysis of these presentations I have developed a stronger understanding of the value of this work and of myself as a facilitator of inquiry. Emily, whose challenge was impatience and boredom, found herself during this project. In represented herself as asking a friend for with her friend told something good will dog thanked her with this presentation, mind it confirmed the had about my teaching so quickly from a

Illustration 4.16 Emily's dog puppet

impatient and bored her presentation she an impatient dog advice. Her dealing her to just believe that come out of it and the friend. I struggled both because in my fears and self-doubt I and because it moved problem into a solution without inquiring into the nature of the challenge. Is it wrong to simply have

96
faith that learning will come from every experience? No, but is it enough? Do I believe that this suggested resolution will have an impact on Emily’s impatience or her feelings about this project? Not much. I believe the project could have been organized differently to allow for greater reflection after and less before the art-making process. Such a process would better manifest my growing understanding that I should not be forcing art to be something that reflects on life, but rather creating opportunities to ask how natural and human-made artifacts do reflect life. If the puppetry unit had been consistent with this belief, Emily may have been less bored leading up to the puppetry and had more opportunities to reflect on what she had gained from the experience.

I had hoped that focusing on the details of a puppet’s metaphor and reflecting on its implications for one’s own life would have had greater impact on students’ personal challenges. I noticed, however, that many students had difficulty making this connection. Emily reflected, “I didn’t get to solve my challenge because I sometimes forget that I needed to solve it. Maybe I need something to help me remember.” In addition to providing evidence of my non-generative emphasis on problem solving, I felt that this comment also seemed to refute my proposition that art can be something that helps us raise our consciousness. However, I do not believe that this conclusion can be drawn based upon one participant’s reflection. My own experiences, the experiences of many other artists and art students, as well as art educators, confirm the idea that art can and should be used to inspire personal and social transformation. However, it seems likely to me that if everyone knew how to do this, art classrooms, and our images of them, would be quite different. Ultimately, I had to reach the conclusion that my teaching practice simply had not fully conveyed this value of art. I was still learning.
I see now that I emphasized the problem-solution paradigm throughout this project, although it was not consistent with my own beliefs about education or art. The vagueness of my understanding of inquiry created great anxiety in me. If this work was not about finding a solution, what was it about? I faced my biggest teacher fear: a question for which I had no answer. I only learned what inquiry is about by doing my own inquiry.

I found that it’s about finding out what it’s about. It is about finding the courage to ask a question and search for possibilities; it is about inquiring into our personal and exploring how we understand them differently perceive through a new lens. My challenge would be truly present to the power of art and the learners to help me and enthusiastic possibilities are created. I could inspire by being inspired.

Out of this challenge I created the possibility of inspiring others through art by initiating an art group in which educator/friends would meet to inquire into personal consistency and growth through art. I committed to creating a safe and inspiring environment; I would not feel nervous; and want to be there. I set the month in advance and by the time the day of the came around I had lost my confidence and gained the flu and had to cancel. Luckily, I recommitted, rescheduled, and reconsidered what lit me up about this work. Friends arrived and shared the possibility of creating a mutually supportive, creative group in which we shared ideas, asked questions without having answers, and pushed for deep inquiry into our own inconsistencies by creating and reflecting on art.
Feedback to presentations

Despite approaching the conclusion of the unit, I attempted to reconceive of my approach, providing greater opportunity for students to express their ideas without striving for my approval. After each presentation, they wrote each other feedback on small slips of paper. The slips of paper were all formatted to record the name of the puppeteer presenting and a brief comment under the sentence starter, “One thing about your puppet or your puppet’s story that spoke to me was...”. This starter helped to inspire some responses, although many of the students recorded their thoughts without relying on it at all. I found that students were much more open about their thinking than they had been for assigned journal entries and expressed a variety of different ideas that may have not been presented had I required a specific type of response. Some of the responses were silly, but over all they expressed some very relevant observations. They were also overwhelmingly empathetic and kind. The majority of the comments included supportive messages, exclamatory remarks like “Good job!” and often little smiles and hearts, which, while not necessarily particularly meaningful, are supportive.

Through their written feedback the students acknowledged one another for their openness, courage, and perseverance. Samantha commended Rose for being open to advice by reflecting, “Listening to your friend is one thing, but trying out what she/he said is great!” Samantha similarly acknowledged Nick in her comment, “I’m glad you listened to your friend because if you didn’t you would be breaking down right now.” She not only recognized Nick’ choices for wellbeing, but also empathized with his plight and truly understood the anxiety that his self-doubt created. The students gave kudos to those who did solo presentations and also honoured one another for the brave acts of their puppets. One thing Susan shared with Robert that impacted her was “the fact that you
faced your fear and had the courage to go back up [the tree after you fell].” Susan shared with Emma “...you had the courage to say sorry,” and pointed out to Samantha, “[Y]ou didn’t gave [sic] up and you went and talked to your parents even though you knew you were going to have a fight.” Susan acknowledged that it is draining and demoralizing to attempt to act in accordance with your beliefs only to repeatedly find your progress impeded. This is the nature of personal change. Once we believe that we should proceed a certain way in life, we must hold tight to our beliefs because they will be challenged constantly. Perhaps internal conflicts are helpful because they force us to identify what we truly believe. There are often new points of view that can be useful to consider in choosing our path, but they can also distract us from our purpose. If we believe strongly in our path, we are bound to face challenges to our beliefs and actions. We must consider how we will face those challenges. Transformation is not easy, but having safe opportunities to confront obstacles in our youth may help us persevere through demoralizing times in the future.

A few students expressed to some of their peers that they could not understand those classmates’ challenges based on their presentations. Comments like, “Great performance but I really don’t get how your challenge relates to that,” were often directed toward the same two or three students, which concerned me. I noticed that Jake, who wrote comments such as “What was your challenge. It was unclear to me?” “What was the thing?” or “Did you actually solve the problem forever?” responded this way less and less as the presentations progressed. Instead, I noticed, he really considered the experiences people were trying to express. He practiced empathetic listening, even though this was not something that we had discussed in class. To Samantha he
responded, "About family issues don’t be afraid because there are millions of families that have the same problem." To Betty he suggested, "Relax and try to concentrate on the bigger picture. I got a friend from my old school who has the same challenge so don’t worry." To June he confided, "I used to have the same problem. It would used to take me 4 hours to finish my homework. Now I just listen to music when I do my homework. You can try that to [sic]."

The use of metaphor in art may make it more difficult for viewers to discern the artist’s intended meaning or the literal challenge to which the metaphor referred, but this does not in any way weaken the work or the learning. In fact, it may strengthen the value or the learning that comes from the experience as people respond to the metaphor in unexpected ways that may open up new pathways for understanding. It is possible that viewers might perceive something that would not have been apparent in a completely literal interpretation. I wish that this attribute of metaphors had been made more apparent during this inquiry, either through discussion or, if possible, with direct encounters reflecting on metaphors. In this way all of the participants would have entered into the process understanding that those observing art may never fully comprehend the thoughts of the artist; nevertheless, their perceptions may help the artist clarify or expand on his or her understanding.

Students’ feedback was often more astute and relevant than the individual who made the suggestion could have known. Sometimes the metaphor was so well extended that the students watching the puppet presentation did not gather the specifics, or sometimes even the basics, of the literal challenge being presented. Interestingly, they still were able to reflect on what they had seen and understood, and often gave advice
based on the metaphor. Rose used a metaphor that many students interpreted literally. Her puppet was a visually stunning horse with blinders on that had been created in such a way that it needed to be observed from above or behind to be identified, thus some of the students did not even know what type of creature her puppet was. Yet her puppet presentation provoked some interesting observations and responses. In her presentation another puppet suggested to the horse, who was running sideways with great difficulty, she should try running forwards instead of sideways. Although some students seemed confused by Rose’s metaphoric presentation and commented without referring to the specific content of the presentation, Mackenzie shared, “I know what it feels like to slip in the wrong direction.” What David P. took from Rose’s presentation was “that looking forward makes you run faster.” By reinterpreting these responses to Rose’s metaphor back into her challenge of being distracted, she gains affirmation of her experiences in facing her challenge and reaffirmation of her goal to look forward and avoid distractions.

Mackenzie’s puppet presentation elicited some of the strongest metaphoric response. Her puppet was the heavily guarded prisoner. Based on her puppet and presentation alone, the sentiment of feeling trapped was clearly expressed; however, the nature of her literal entrapment was left undisclosed. Still, the students’ feedback to Mackenzie clearly expressed understanding and empathy for her predicament. Miranda responded, “I feel sorry for you that your (sic) traped (sic) and I see and feel your want for freedom.” The theme of escape also resonated with Emma who shared her advice in response to Mackenzie’s presentation, “Breaking free...The idea is tempting, but you might have to wait for just the right time.”
At times the students responded to details that appeared irrelevant or incidental, but in their comments they hit upon ideas that were essential. David P. responded to Mackenzie’s metaphorical imprisonment, that, “...the problem is kind of hard to solve.” While he may not have pushed Mackenzie further in her thinking about her challenge, he reflected what he saw and felt, which affirms Mackenzie in her experiences. Another student remarked in her feedback to Mackenzie that one thing about Mackenzie’s presentation that spoke to her was “when you didn’t talk back to the guards. It must be hard to not do that.” Again, this response refers to the metaphors of the presentation; however, it speaks just as authentically to Mackenzie’s literal challenge.

Mackenzie’s challenge focused on whether to continue living with her father or to move and live with her mother in the United States. While the control that Mackenzie had over this choice in reality was questionable, her metaphor spoke to perhaps a more pressing challenge: Mackenzie felt she had no control over her situation. She was trapped by her confusion and by the pull or push of adults in her life. Thus she was locked away, guarded, trapped. If the guards represent these adults, the observation of the difficulty one must have not talking back becomes more relevant and profound. The students could relate strongly to the feeling of entrapment and powerlessness without needing to understand the specific situation in Mackenzie’s life by which she felt trapped. Rather than moving directly to suggesting a solution to solve the problem or feeling that no solution is possible, they could empathize with Mackenzie’s experience of life. Metaphor thus creates space for new insights that might not be perceived within the context of literal interpretation.
The students were a great resource whose experiences we could have tapped into more. Devon was able to provide the perspective of a younger sibling for those older siblings who simply see their little brother or sister as an intentional nuisance. Although most of us also have the experience of being needy for attention, when we find ourselves in a position of power (such as teacher or older sibling), we sometimes forget what it is like to feel unimportant or unvalued. We also forget how the emotions of insecurity can provoke us to act in ways of which we would normally disapprove. The feedback forms gave students an opportunity to give one another advice from a place of understanding and empathy. Mark, for example, an oldest child who I have seen caring sensitively and with kindness for his younger sisters shared his perspective on familial relationships with his peers. Responding to Abdalla’s challenge interacting with his disruptive younger brother, Mark suggested, “[G]ive your brother a chance. Talk to him seriously.” Emily told Wallace “Your brother only wants attention! It’s okay! Love him and he’ll love you.” Samantha shared with Miranda from her own experience, “Ignoring people doesn’t really help much, so try telling the person [who is trying to get you to do his/her homework] that you don’t want to do his/her homework.” Giving advice based on experience and backing up the advice with an explanation helps the person receiving the advice to think through the consequences of that choice and make a more informed decision.

The participants shared their personal experiences, perceptions, and advice freely in their feedback to their peers. The diversity of their responses reminds me that every individual has a unique set of values and ultimately we each draw our own lessons. For example Nick shared with Rose, “One thing about your puppet or your puppet’s story
that spoke to me was...that you took your friend’s advice. I think that I should always trust my friends no matter what.” The complete trust Nick put in friends is contrasted by Abdalla’s suggestion to withhold complete trust in his response to Emma to “think twice before telling something personal [to others].” Rose responded to Abdalla’s presentation, “It was interesting how you would still be friends with [your friend] when he broke your thing.” By seeing the puppets respond in ways that the student audience might not have considered, they recognized that different people will respond differently to different challenges. This feedback also served as support for Abdalla, affirming his commitment to friendship. Although others might not have made the same decision, they all saw that each individual ultimately must make his or her own decisions about how to respond to personal challenges. As Lee pointed out to Betsy, “I liked how you asked a friend for advice and kept doing what you planned to do.”

During Emily’s presentation in which her dog asked for help dealing with her impatience, the bunny suggested that she “just tell herself that something good might come out of your patience.” In response, the dog thanks the bunny and muses unconvincingly “Maybe that will help me deal with my challenge,” through bouts of giggling. In her feedback, Rose responded, “It was interesting how the tip didn’t help you but you still thanked [your friend].” This observation may have served as a reminder to both students about the importance of valuing friends even when we do not trust their advice. I saw in the comment the possibility of an even larger understanding. For me, it emphasized the importance of staying open to the wisdom of all those around me, that sometimes suggestions that seem unimportant or unhelpful are the ones to which we
should listen most closely. Sometimes the ideas that seem too simple are the ones whose complexity we are not yet ready to understand.

The wisdom of the students helped draw out some key elements of personal growth that one must learn as a self-reflective human being: Everyone has challenges. Most people need to work them out for themselves; it's helpful, however, to see others listen, take your challenge seriously, and reflect about your situation. You can only change easy to transform your own behaviours how your choices, whatever you you and others. What works for situation is not advice for situation. If you believe in to commit told though you challenge progress! Don't give up!"

**Students' Reflections**

they spent several minutes in unsolicited silence as they read each other's comments. Their enthusiasm for this part of the
learning process inspired their journal reflections. Many of the students noted that they were thankful for the advice of their peers and for the tangible support they were shown. They expressed pride in their work. Receiving written feedback from their peers helped the students see that the challenges they face are normal. Jake commented, "I learned that everybody has challenges and nobody is perfect. Everybody has challenges and we got to face them." Rose shared, "Today I found out that many people has (sic) quite similar challenge as me. I also found that my solutions for the challenge is (sic) actually more than I expected." In addition to her surprise as how common it was to struggle with distraction, she seemed to be comforted by the variety of suggestions from others' experience. By hearing that our challenge is commonplace we can take ourselves outside of our self-judgment, realize we are normal, and become aware of the diversity of responses people have developed to respond to our challenges.

Perhaps the most surprising reflection came from June, the participant who shared her challenge about getting distracted from her homework as she held her partially completed puppet head in her hand. Although June seemed to me to be uninspired by the puppetry work, after reading her feedback she reflected, "The comments I read were very interesting. Many people gave good ideas to help my challenge. Some I laughed at because it was very similar to my challenge... This is so cool! I want to do it again." I had to wonder, what did she want to do again? Did she want another chance to make a puppet? Did she want to redo her presentation? Did she want another opportunity to get feedback from her peers? Did she want to help her peers with their challenges again? Did she want to watch more puppet shows? Or did she just enjoy getting lots of feedback? I suspect that for the majority of the students, the support of their peers in a
permanent, written form is very meaningful, especially for those students who had fears and insecurities about sharing their challenge or their puppet. This theory is supported by Susan, who wrote, “Everyone wrote a comment and I think that was a good way to ask questions or comment on your puppet because then it would [not] be as imbarassing [sic]. I think having the comments is fun because then you know what people are thinking about play or challenge/problem.”

The presentations were exciting and inspirational and the enthusiasm from this culminating event was reflected in journal entries. Robert wrote, “The presentations were FUN because we got to look at everyone in a different point of view. It was really crazy too. I learned that people have different challenges that are blocking them.” The unconditional support from the class was so strong that it led Emma to reflect, “Sometimes last minute things can be better than planned out things.” I understand now that it is only through in depth reflection that I was able to perceive students’ breakthroughs such as the participant who gained insight into the motivation of his sister’s annoying behaviours; Betsy, who reflected, “presenting with the person you had a fight with makes it good because we’re good friends now!” or Susan, who saw the possibility of calming down so that she “could hear the problem [her] brother is having...instead of taking [her anger] out on my brother.” Because I was unsure of my direction during the process, I assumed that the students did not trust me and would not come along for the ride. In actuality, I was the one who had jumped ship. The students were just sailing along, waiting to see where they would end up. This observation helps me see the importance of reflection, especially of hearing students’ voices sharing what they had learned and really listening closely. I would like to have given them more
opportunities to share their voices within this inquiry, especially in the analysis, as they had much to say and I much to learn.

While I left the data collection segment of this research with a sense of unease, I eventually found a space, I suppose out of necessity, in which I could accept that the events of the research process. I began to reflect on where I had from where I was, letting go of what I wished I had and where I was. Once I accepted where I was, I could proceed. I had to find this space and by my practice, I confidence to revisit my data and push my learning. My emerging posited all By continuing to see more comfortable taking risks that others or counterproductive. By truly being a leave behind all my traditional and students. As a facilitator than as a teacher who empty cups, I could to ask questions the answer. I spent a reading, taking observing and others in asking what it would learning. As I practiced new look like to move from teaching to facilitating approaches, I reflected back into my research, returning to the cycle: inquiring, practicing, reflecting, and continuing to inquire.
Pause
Sometimes I feel inspired and words pour out of me. At these times, the process of creation is like magic. Creation flows like warm honey. It is a joy. It is fulfilling. I feel a creative circuit flowing through my body. Not just a creative outlet. That seems to imply that ideas are simply sitting inside us waiting for an opportunity to get out, to manifest themselves. This is not my experience of creativity. Me...

I can sit and sit and sit for hours and hours, some times even days.

...without inspiration.

frustration

only

and self-degradation
V. Seeking meaning

It can be a very frustrating experience to have to be creative at will, especially when you hit a creative wall. I feel I am just waiting for it to come. Many an image, some words, a sound, a metaphor, something will spark an idea in me. It is that spark that then can flow through me and allow creation to be possible. We need not only creative outlets, but also inlets. Without those sparks, I find creation is not possible. Maybe it works differently for other people. I think some people are more productive than I am. At times I find that process is not upsetting, but my process... that I cannot write, I cannot draw, I cannot create without inspiration. How do we ease the pressure of having to measure up to others? The answer is simple. Play! I know it. I knew it, but I still have difficulty practicing it. Learning to play takes work! And I struggle with knowing that the world of work simply won’t take my play seriously! I see an opening for facilitating learning! I can see the challenges of my students and I WILL take play seriously!

On the cover of Miranda’s journal is a pencil drawing of a girl in thought. The thought bubble rising from her head encapsulates the words, “Thinking in progress.” This image resonated strongly with me as I reflected on my experiences and the experiences of the other participants in this research. Throughout the inquiry we were all “in progress”. I recognize that not only my actions but also my thoughts were constantly evolving, and the evolution did not end with the data collection, nor do I suspect it ever will. The writing and artwork that document this research project are not simply end products. They are records of these processes of learning, both in me and in the students.

This research is concerned with human potential to grow and evolve. To recognize the impact of art and artistic (metaphoric) thought in supporting possibilities,
we must see learning as a cyclical rather than linear. Engaged in this cycle, our selves
and all of our works throughout life are in progress. Educators, however, are often
trained to approach learning in a linear fashion. Thus, attempts to manifest new
conceptions of learning often bring resistance and frustration. How do we transform
deeply engrained patterns of being? While this research began as a living inquiry into the
use of puppetry and metaphor as tools for developing self-awareness and fostering
transformation, the inquiry increasingly attended to the certainties and uncertainties
surrounding teaching and learning as they relate to transformation.

**Beyond the binary**

Educational practices that view individuals as complete entities that are simply
developing into their inevitable form (like a pupa destined to become a beetle or a
butterfly), rather than as something not yet defined that will evolve based on internal
(genetic) characteristics; external (societal) influences; and choice, preclude individuals’
ability to see themselves as “becoming” or “in process” and limits what appears to be
possible. As Mackenzie remarked when others criticized their own half-completed
puppets, “You can’t judge it when it’s half way done.” When we begin to view art as a
process rather than simply a product, it becomes easier to accept that our work will not
look like the finished image we have in our head when we are getting started. Personal
development can be viewed the same way. We cannot judge ourselves for how we are
now; we can only commit to growing into the best version of us that we can be and strive
to live in ways that are consistent with our beliefs.

A culture of labeling and marking encourages students and educators to maintain
normative thinking and acting. When labeling becomes the regular consequence of
judging, systemic pigeon-holing of individuals appears to be the only possible response to judgments; thus, we begin to justify confining students in educational tracks without inquiring into the social construction or social impact of labeling. "Bad" students must be watched, isolated, or disciplined; "slow" students must be given remediation, at times taught in separate classes, and counseled away from challenges; "gifted and talented" children must have extra opportunities that others are not offered. Labels formed in youth often have long-lasting impact on self-perception as well as community perception. Such tracking exacerbates social divisions and has been shown to further disadvantage youth from disadvantaged communities (Oakes, 2003). Forms of adult assessment that place judgment without contributing to a learning process can have equally severe consequences: a teacher that does not produce expected results may simply lose her job. Fear of making mistakes, being seen as a failure, keeps people of all ages from risk-taking and divergent thinking. Becoming present to the cultural construction of the binary labels of "good" and "bad" or "right" and "wrong" can help us see the counter-productivity of adhering to such labels, and reveal how labeling may serve as self-fulfilling prophesy.

As culture is, in some respects, simply a collection of values and judgments, it is often difficult for educators to recognize the ways in which our teaching promotes binary thinking. The result is that we tend to view problems, scientific or personal, in terms of black or white, right or wrong, either/or. When we see learning and problem solving as linear paths, we view any experience that does not follow the path as "wrong," while we view abiding by the prescribed path as "right." In classrooms where binaries are unquestioned, creativity is stifled, as are critical thinking skills. This is because one
person possesses “truth” and all others must seek his or her affirmation. By labeling work or thinking as “good”, we must conversely have an idea of “bad” work. We strive for one while avoiding the other and we must have experience with one to understand the other. By exploring the contiguous space between binaries we reveal possibility. Through an epistemological shift we may provoke an ontological shift.

Through my data collection I became highly conscious of my obstinate binary language. Despite my consciousness and efforts to move beyond this language I still would comment, “Great thinking!” or “Good idea!” on students’ work. I was attempting to support the participants’ thinking in their journal reflections; however, by labeling their thoughts in this way it was as if I was pointing out when they were on the “right” track so they could follow up on it, even when I did not know which path was right. By telling students they have found it, they are no longer encouraged to continue seeking possibilities. The aim of learning then seems to be approval or positive reinforcement, rather than personal growth or intrinsic rewards. Students will work for a treat or a grade or a sticker, or “Good thinking!” but this work will lead them to continuously seek out the “right” answer in life, to the neglect of many possibilities.

I noticed the youth internalized the values of binary language and judgment and limited themselves based on the values they have learned in school. They expressed their struggles through problem-solving language, just as I did. They also were quick to label their own work as “bad” or “a mistake”. Art educators often perpetuate systems that place value on final products without emphasizing the educational value of the creative process. The imposition of a linear conception of learning on art and art making alienates many people from art. By understanding the artwork to be more than the “good copy” or
finished work, we revalue the intent of the art, the evolution of the work, and the process and story of the artist. The artwork is seen as part of a larger body of work and is understood or valued within the context of its creation. To understand art on this level, learners must have experiences reflecting on and growing from their own art processes. Similarly, to understand personal development as more than reaching a goal or fixing a problem, we must have experiences reflecting on our learning.

Our ability to think divergently and innovatively rests on our willingness to let go of our judgments and see new possibilities, even when facing challenges. We can begin by recognizing when we are judging, and naming the forces that inform our perceptions. By identifying the lens we are using when we make a judgment, we notice that the judgment is a product of a particular way of thinking, the voice and message of a familial, social, or cultural influence on our lives, but not the only way of thinking. The voice that tells us that we are not skilled enough, not artistic enough, or not smart enough is a voice that we have acquired from outside us. By recognizing that our perceptions are filtered through socially constructed worldviews, we acknowledge that we create our judgments and they do not have to control us.

An educational paradigm shift that creates possibilities beyond binaries does not come without struggles, but it encourages embracing those struggles. Throughout this inquiry, whenever I would take a step into the unfamiliar, attempt to take a non-linear approach or reflect without privileging binary judgments, my fear of the unknown would send me back to cling to familiar paradigms in which I could control the outcomes. I struggled to move beyond the negative conception of “problem” to the seemingly more neutral notion of “challenge”; however, I continued to conceive of the process as problem
solving. I simply could not see another possibility because I had not fully let go of this paradigm and opened myself up to another. This paradigm was set at the beginning of the inquiry by asking students to identify a goal they are striving for. As MJ noted, "When you say 'goal' (the students) think,

'Oh, I have to write something for my report card' or 'It's New Years and I need to write a resolution' or 'I want to get better at this 'cause that's what I've been told I need to get better at.' So think about,

instead of telling them...giving them a frame, give them an opening so that they can respond to you and then you can see where you're coming from so that you can see what you're thinking about."

Although I heard and understood this suggestion on some level at the time it was given, my problem solving conception of this research did not seem to have any space for creating an opening. I continued to focus on and share my challenges of finding joy and avoiding the feeling of defeat, rather than generating a new way of thinking about sorrow and joy or reflecting on how I create their meanings. I did not see how to find the
contiguity, the both/and rather than either/or, within sorrow and joy for myself, and therefore I did not create a space for students to shed light on their own meaning making.

It was only through reflection without judgment that I was able to embrace the learning that I derived from my experiences. Following the advice of inquiry practitioners, in reflection, I attempted not to be too hard on myself in my first attempts at my new practice. Perhaps I would have viewed things differently had I had the advice of Llewellyn (2002) to guide me:

Your first try at inquiry is usually not your best. But there is no need to dwell on how bad your first inquiry lesson might have been. You won’t die, your students will survive, and best of all, you get another day to try again. If the first try goes bad, find a quiet place to sit and write down what you think went well and what you would do differently the next time. Make notes about revising your lesson. Make revisions and suggestions for the next time you do that lesson...During the second try, have a colleague you trust and respect observe you. Ask this person for feedback and to act as a reflective friend. Tell your friend that you are trying to change your instructional style and want feedback on those specific areas. (Llewellyn, 2002, p. 108)

Rather than judging what was good or bad, I am now striving to define what I would like to create in a community of art inquiry. I envision art inquiry that serves as window into new ways of being. I am letting go of the belief that I am helping students to understand what is right and entering into dialogue with them in which it is safe to question, take risks, and pose possibilities that seem impossible. We do not simply look though a window I have presented, but create a community together, opening up our minds to share with one another what is inside and to express possibilities. What I am able to create today as a facilitator of learning is so much more powerful because I create trust with other learners so that they can trust themselves.
Living Inquiry

Living inquiry recognizes that learning does not only occur when we are in school, but also in the experiencing of life and in thinking about how we live. Certainly we can learn a great deal in formal learning situations, but these are only a fraction of the many ways in which people understand the world and their place in it. By learning about what people do outside of school to make sense of the world, and by considering ways to enhance or build upon that experience, teachers and students can bridge the gap between school learning and "real world" learning, facilitating awareness and critical reflection of beliefs and their manifestations, assessing the consistency between beliefs and actions, and affecting personal transformation. Reflecting on personal beliefs in new ways better equips all learners to think critically about (obvious or subtle) social messages, ultimately helping us find our power to see ourselves as agents of change in our own lives, and promoting thoughtful activism. My own reflective process throughout this inquiry brought me to perceive more clearly that fostering personal development and initiative in my students requires a deeper understanding of the ways in which my teaching and learning practice still manifests the banking conception of education.

Reflecting on my experiences, I was concerned that my research did not turn out to be what I thought I had set out to accomplish. Students may have no had any great epiphanies about social justice. I did not have a neat package to present. I had not created a sequential process that could be reproduced, had no research findings elucidating the impact of the curriculum on student agency, but I believe that in many ways this is the conclusion that can be drawn about learning. Learning simply is not always neat and sequential. Sometimes it takes months or even years to know what you
learned from an experience, and then you just keep building on that learning. There is no
direct input-output causal relationship, nor should there be. If we believe that learning
should be more than simply regimenting the mind, we must honour the learning that
comes from all types of experiences, even ones that seem to go “off track”.

Although I rejected the empty vessel metaphor before beginning the research, I
had not actually understood the stronghold that it had on my teaching, nor had I applied
its implications to my own learning. I had to learn through my own experience that when
one struggles to learn, leaving the well-worn, linear paths of others’ journeys, one learns
the most. By attending to my own challenges as a learner, I could better understand the
ways other learners learn. I needed to be in the process of transforming the way in which
I learn in order to guide other learners to perceive their learning differently. Thus, I
committed to studying and adopting practices that support democratic classrooms and
inspire the development of a critically minded and socially engaged citizenry. In the
context of these understandings, the specific learning outcomes from using puppetry for
personal growth are less important than how learners engage with ideas and how learning
is perceived and expressed. Certainly individual students did gain new perspectives on
their challenges through engagement with metaphor and the puppetry. However, their
experiences in reaching these understandings, rather than my curriculum as I planned it,
taught me the most during the data collection. Our struggles to understand how metaphor
and puppetry might assist personal development, taught me not only about what we
learned through this specific process, but also about how we learn, and perhaps more
importantly, how to facilitate learning.
Educators must begin to function as facilitators of learning, engaging students in their process of generating understandings. I use the plural, understandings, here intentionally to honour the knowledge that students bring to their school learning and the impact that it has on their thinking, and also to create the possibility of questioning positivist assumptions. Time has seen great changes in our approaches to teaching as well as our understandings of each discipline. Educational systems now question phonics versus whole language, creation versus evolution, spontaneous generation versus sexual reproduction, manifest destiny versus Eurocentric colonization, geocentrism versus heliocentrism, memorization versus creative problem solving, demonstration vs. student initiated inquiry, and so on. In virtually every discipline we recognize that the “truths” of today are different than (yet still strongly influenced by) the truths of yesterday and that there may be truths of which we have not yet conceived. We see that there is often room for multiple right answers and attempt to make room for them all in our classrooms. The same holds true for art classrooms, in which the opportunity for students to seek out their own truths is perhaps the most likely and relevant.

Ultimately this insight leads us to seek out ways to value all ability levels, experiences, and perceptions that students bring with them to school. Out of this revaluing, we have had such movements as Howard Gardner’s theory of Multiple Intelligences (Gardner, 1993), which encourages teachers and students to appreciate the variety of intelligences that are often devalued or overlooked in schools, such as interpersonal and visual/spatial intelligence. By revaluing students’ knowledge we also create the possibility that students are not confined to simply learning the teacher’s body of knowledge, that not having a particular set of knowledge may not be a deficit but
rather an opportunity for growth. These new perceptions and perspectives help each of us communicate and interact as both learners and teachers so that we are able to support one another through our journeys of personal growth, approaching mistakes as not only acceptable, but as beneficial to our development as individuals and essential to the generation of innovation.

We might put into question the very existence of mistakes and failure altogether by understanding them as social constructs based on cultural norms. We might instead consider the metaphor of stepping on stones to cross a creek. These stones are not part of a marked path and we cannot be sure if they will even support us, making our journey seem to be risky. In fact we may even slip on the rocks, fall into the water, and injure ourselves. These are all possibilities when leave the safety of a sanctioned path. However, we learn from this experience that we are capable of taking risks, and that we are capable of carrying on if the risk does not lead to a desired outcome. We learn how to judge the stability and slipperiness of rocks so that we can make better judgments next time. In addition, by maintaining our will to reach the other side of the river despite the unknowns we must face, we are given the opportunity to explore a new realm of possibilities and learn from the experiences that would have been impossible on the path from which we came. We may even gain a better understanding of where we have been by seeing our pasts and ourselves from a new perspective. My experience of re/viewing my data has allowed me to look critically at my understanding and practice of learning so that I can better practice what I believe.

As I have suggested earlier, all aspects of the learning environment that we create manifest and contribute to the philosophies of education that we practice. To transform
our pedagogies, we must look critically at and transform our practices. I now focus my inquiries as a learner/educator beyond product-oriented learning and toward creative risk-taking, moving away from the notion that we have to know the answer in order to ask the question. In art education, especially, “[e]xperimentation...must be overtly addressed: our job is to let students know that they should experiment and that they have permission to fail and try again. Over time, such guidance will encourage students to become risk takers who push ideas” (Walker, 2001. p. 30). Walker cites Andy Goldsworthy’s process in creating his ephemeral art as a model for “practices of inquiry, reflection, and experimentation” due to his emphasis on “the process over the product.” Each time we put ourselves in a situation where we are unsure or uncomfortable we push ourselves to conceive of new possibilities, often ones of which we have never before conceived. We begin our inquiries as novices, but can create ourselves as innovators.

I strive to revalue of the process of learning by exploring and emphasizing art inquiry. I recognize that many of my actions still show preference to the product, leaving my students and me both struggling to value our processes. Despite these struggles I continue to challenge all learners and myself to engage in more democratic learning processes. The banking metaphor and the empty vessel metaphor manifest all the fallacies of linear, product-oriented education (see Appendix I). In process-oriented, inquiry-based education, however, learners wonder about different ways of thinking, explore new perspectives, make decisions about which parts of the new ways of thinking contribute to greater understanding, integrate new perspectives into old schemas, and provoke a new set of questions leading to new inquiry. This cyclical approach to learning
acknowledges the variety of stimuli that impact learning, and respects that there is not a
direct causal relationship between the impartment of knowledge and learning.

By understanding learning as meaning-making, we open the learning process up
to ideas never before conceivable, to innovation, and to passion for learning. We validate
the experiences that learners bring to learning and the understandings and questions that
they take from it, and we encourage them to take ownership for their learning and pursue
their own inquiry. Ideally, inquiry should evolve from the questions generated through
students' own life experiences. Students' experiences generate questions about the world
or their place in it; their work inquires into the nature of their questions in order to
generate new perspectives or understandings. Bringing new perspectives or understanding into lived experiences provokes further questions and inquiry. Each cycle
takes the inquiry to a new level. As in McNiff's (2002) description of action research, in
all cyclical inquiry:

- We review our current practice,
- identify an aspect that we want to investigate,
- imagine a way forward,
- try it out, and
- take stock of what happens.
- We modify what we are doing in the light of what we have
found, and continue working in this new way (try another
option if the new way of working is not right)
- monitor what we do,
- review and evaluate the modified action,
- and so on... (¶ 19)

Embarking on this research, I had not understood the significance of spiral inquiry
on developing democratic classrooms that foster self-discovery and personal agency. My
linear approach to learning obviously impacted not only my own experiences, but also
those of the learners in the research. Had I been present to the value of cyclical
approaches to learning and had I internalized this understanding enough for it to influence my language and actions, perhaps students would have been able to engage more deeply in their own inquiries, rather than putting so much energy into trying to understand mine. Although I had a strong desire to leave students the freedom to create their own inquiries, as I reached places of the unknown I resorted to familiar teaching patterns in which I attempted to “teach” students what they should know rather than helping them facilitate their own inquiries. Grasping for guiding pedagogy, I felt overwhelmed by the vast array of ideas I might explore, in none of which I felt confident. I now turn to inquiry-based learning, practicing asking open-ended questions and integrating democratic teaching practices in present and future learning experiences.

In order to facilitate learning in such a way that students have opportunities to value their slips and falls throughout the process of learning, we must reconceive of achievement. "Not everything that counts can be counted and not everything that can be counted counts." This saying was reportedly posted in the office of Albert Einstein (Herman, Aschbacher, & Winters, 1992)...” (Llewellyn, 2002, p. 99). In living inquiry, the knowledge to be acquired is not prescribed; instead insight is sought through living practices. A finished art project is no indicator of learning or of the generation of meaning. The abundance of art projects that end up in attic boxes or in garbage cans and recycle bins are evidence of this non-correlation. It is reflection that infuses art with meaning, generates new perceptions, and takes us into the next round of creation. The pressure to begin artwork from a place of inspiration can inhibit the creative process and produce anxiety that deters individuals from further experiences with art. By instead
reflecting on process, students are freed up during creation and are able to learn through the experience, taking their art and their learning into further inquiries.

Artists practice this spiral inquiry. As Marilyn G. Stewart (Ed.) explains in introducing a synthesis of Walker's (2001) ideas,

... (A) rtists rarely proceed by making one conceptually isolated product after another. Instead, they grapple with broad, important issues, ideas, and questions through a series of explorations. They tend to probe these ideas at increasingly deeper levels, asking new questions and acquiring more knowledge in the process. Their search is personal and is often informed by research. They create problems and challenge themselves to address them within self-imposed boundaries. (p. v)

Students who engage in reflective artmaking practices without the threat of failure learn that risks are acceptable, even desirable. A risk might be taking an unpopular position, studying an esoteric subject, interacting with a new person or with a familiar person in a new way, proposing an innovative theory, or making the leap to a new career, perhaps even pioneering a field. Of course each of these risks will come with opposition and challenges. The path not likely to be simple or stress-free; however, the benefits are likely to outweigh the risks. Those who have prior experiences taking risks and being supported through mistakes or failures are most likely to engage in innovation. If we see the benefit of engaging with difficult experiences, we are more likely to take risks.

While opportunities to forge an innovative path may offer new possibilities for some, it may also present challenges both for facilitators and learners. If the learning process is understood through the experience rather than before the experience, it is likely that at one or more points during the learning experience students or teacher will struggle to see the next step in the process. The fear of the unknown may contribute largely to reluctance to engage in undefined or non-linear learning processes. Certainly stresses
created by my own attempt at engaging students in non-linear art inquiry left me feeling unenthusiastic about undertaking such a challenge again. However, upon reflection, I see not only the necessity for such artistic and investigative opportunities but perhaps some clearer guidelines to help me and others understand the conditions needed to support living inquiry in art education. As Llewellyn (2002) suggested, “Self-doubt is a natural part of any change process. Don’t listen to the voices (in your head) and don’t listen to the cynics down the hall. Trust your instincts! Keep at it. Find that reflective friend, have lunch together, and gain the assurance that you are on the right track” (p. 109).

Now I challenge myself to create a reflective community with my students. I consider what kind of community would allow both students and teacher to be in places of challenge, in aporia. What facilitation skills would I need to practice to create a place where students and teacher were all learners, supporting one another in their inquiries into personal growth? As an instructor of an art methods course for elementary pre-service teachers, I invite my students into this possibility, to encourage inquiry in the classroom and to build communication and trust. By building active listening skills I can help pre-service teachers clarify and justify what they believe is best for their students so that they can promote active learning and foster a community of inquiry in their own classrooms.

**Meaning making and metaphor**

I use the model of inquiry-based science education to inform my conception and practice of inquiry-based art education. Science and art have much in common. They both provide means to make sense of the world around us; they are simply different modes to create meaning. As Eisner and Barone (1997) perceptively noted,
...(T)here is no acid test to determine the true value of either art or propaganda. We can be taken in by either. But we hasten to add that we can be taken in by scientific work as well as by works of art. The very categories and procedures that we believe to be legitimate in science may themselves create a profound bias because of what such procedures neglect. We mistakenly take the part for the whole. We forget that the methodology that is used in social science to give us a so-called objective take on the world itself is not only partial but also riddled with values that do not readily surface on first inspection. (p. 90)

The relationship between art and science inquiry goes even further. Both art and science provide data through which we produce or interpret knowledge. “Hermeneutics begins from the premise that human reality—that is the way we think about, discuss, represent, and convey possibilities—is embedded in language, both written and spoken” (Smits, 1997, p. 287). As we use words and symbols to express our perceptions of reality, in effect we create our realities. Metaphors are significant because when we identify the metaphors by which we understand our realities we are actually making explicit our own lenses, our own subjective frameworks for understanding the world. According to Lakoff and Johnson (1980) “changes in our conceptual system do change what is real for us and affect how we perceive the world and act upon those possibilities” (pp. 145-146). By recognizing that we perceive reality through subjective lenses, we create the possibility of perceiving, thinking, and acting through different lenses.

I became increasingly aware of the common usage of metaphoric language by concentrating on daily language throughout this inquiry. I began to see that creative thought and metaphor are nearly inseparable. I reflected on the metaphor created by the class for their community mural the previous year in which the students considered presenting their class community as a puzzle in which each person was a puzzle piece. They also represented themselves metaphorically and symbolically in other written and
art work. I was aware that even when the students did not identify metaphoric language, they understood it. For example, in discussing Zach (Bell, 1998), MJ pointed out the figure of speech "they dropped the bomb." While the students did not, even when led to do so, identify this language as metaphoric, they easily understood its meaning.

One cannot assume that individuals understand what a metaphor is or can recognize one when they see it simply because they use metaphoric language. A metaphor is a figure of speech or "rhetorical trope in which a comparison is made between two seemingly unrelated subjects" (Wikipedia, 2005). This explicit definition is important because it draws on two important aspects of metaphors: 1) they generally compare two things that are not the same (for example a human and an owl as opposed to a human and another human) and 2) these objects only seem unrelated. Through our interpretation and meaning making we as human beings find similarities. By considering one object or concept (the signified) in terms of a second object or concept (the signifier), the signifier becomes a metaphoric lens through which we understand the signified, creating meaning and providing us with new insights.

Through this inquiry I developed greater understanding both of the impact of metaphors in general and of the ways in which we can extend specific metaphors to understand their impact in our lives. Extending metaphors involves asking detailed questions about how one thing is like the other. At times, we might find that two objects or ideas have similarities yet still do not seem to give meaning to one another. For example, although both my eye and a piece of paper are white, this similarity does not create new insight into either eyes or paper. However, if we move beyond appearance to function; condition; composition; or emotional association, we begin to value things
about the signified that we might not have before considered, such as the possibility that our experiences can be "written" in our eyes or that others may "read" quite a bit about us through our eyes. It is possible, as well, that by extending a metaphor out, we find it does not express the perspective we had hoped, or that it provides no new insight for us. The students recognized the "student as empty vessel" was such a false metaphor, as it did not represent their experiences of education or what education should be.

Students needed opportunities to gain proficiency and confidence in their ability to inquire into the meaning they make in their own lives as well as help their peers inquire more deeply into their lives. In order for students to perceive the metaphors' impact on their lives, I found I must provide students with specific tools or procedure. For example, to help a partner inquire more deeply into the metaphor "my heart is a strawberry," we might ask, "How is your heart like a strawberry?" The author of the metaphor would reply, "They are both red." We could ask, "What other ways does your heart look like a strawberry?" The author/artist might reply, "They are sort of the same shape." We could provoke further and ask more specific questions, "Does your heart have 'seeds' or 'leaves' or a 'stem'?" At this point the metaphor's author may be stumped or may make connections between the stem of a strawberry and the arteries of the heart. If this is the case we can begin to ask about other functional similarities between the heart and the strawberry. We might also begin the inquiry with a description of the heart rather than the metaphor. The response might provide a better feel for the quality or condition that the author would like to express. For example, a heart that feels full, open, and happy might lead us to compare the heart to a sweet, ripe strawberry,
while a heart that feels empty, unhealthy, or abandoned might be compared to a rotten or squashed fruit.

On the other hand, our partner may find through the questioning that she does not actually see her heart as a strawberry, which inevitably will decompose, at all. Perhaps she sees it as a fire truck, rushing to the scene of an accident, or as a machine that seems to run on its own. The possibilities for metaphors are infinite, which is often the limiting factor. Because there are so many possibilities, it may take some time to really find a metaphor that makes sense and provides insight. Therefore, time should be provided to think and return to a metaphor as well as to review metaphors later on to make sure they still fit. We may always reconsider the metaphors by which we live, to adapt them or to adopt a different metaphor that brings more meaningful perspective.

It is important that we do not assume to understand the significance of a metaphor to its creator. We must be sure to encourage our partner to really think through his or her interpretation of the metaphor before we apply our own interpretation. This hermeneutic process may be facilitated through journaling to give the author time for reflection. Once in partners, students facilitate clarification and extension of metaphors, by following a line of questioning that is prompted by the author's answers. In the metaphor “my heart is a strawberry,” for example, the author has focused on the colour of the strawberry; therefore our questions should deal with the appearance of the strawberry, as opposed to the taste. Asking the partner, “Do you eat your heart?” does not help the author think more deeply about the comparison as she or he had conceived of it. Conversely, if the author had made a connection to the function of the strawberry, we would not begin by asking him or her about the colour or size. Instead we would try to understand how the
author sees their heart as functioning like a strawberry. Perhaps in the end he or she will see that the two objects do not function the same way. The author may see the strawberry as storing energy but the heart as sending it energy through the rest of the body. Conversely, the author may see the strawberry as storing energy and the heart as storing emotions and memories, or as both the strawberry and the heart bringing sweetness. There is no right or wrong answer. We are not looking to scientific facts to verify the legitimacy of a metaphor, only the author's belief that it represents his or her current perspective. If that perspective changes, so will the metaphor.

Upon reflection, I have considered that perhaps this structure of providing questions to extend metaphors continues to impose a linear construct on metaphors that does not entirely fit with my expressed value of reflective artmaking processes. An approach to developing questions for extending metaphors that might be more in line with my evolving educational philosophy would be to have students ask one another questions and then reflect on the effectiveness of those questions. As a class we could generate a list of questions that might be helpful to ask.

Beginning with visual images, rather than words can strengthen metaphoric thinking by allowing individuals to think differently. Practice in my own artmaking and in my educator's art group has suggested a different approach to generating initial metaphors. Guided visualizations encourage detailed thinking about metaphors and their implications. In such an exercise, instead of each person generating his or her own metaphor, everyone would begin with the same metaphor (for example, “My heart is a body of water” or “I am a tree”) and each participant would visualize herself metaphorically, focusing on the conditions of the body of water or the tree. Is it big or
small? Is it healthy or sick? Is it turbulent or calm? When we describe the signifier this way, we are also describing ourselves. We see that in effect, our perspective determines our metaphor and that there are many ways to perceive the same thing. By asking many questions about the condition of the tree, we provide opportunities to gain deeper understanding of our own changing condition. We can help learners raise their consciousness about their relationships to visual metaphors simply by asking them to be conscious of their thoughts while they are in the process of creating art. In pairs or small groups they would then share their reflections. While this reflective process may not immediately generate insights into metaphor, with practice, the connection between the artmaking and the challenge being considered will be strengthened.

Reflective partners can ask if the metaphor makes sense within the idea the author is trying to express about him or herself. If the author thinks that it does not make sense, a peer can facilitate the adaptation of the metaphor by asking, “Can it be changed to fit better? Is there another way we can think about the relationship? Would a different comparison work better?” Learners would have the opportunity to help one another and perhaps understand their own metaphors differently. The most important thing to remember is that the metaphor is a manifestation of how we think or understand the world. If it does not seem to express what we think we are trying to say, it is not wrong; it simply is not a metaphor that represents our perspective.

Students may also generate visual metaphors by simply closing their eyes and envisioning themselves in their challenge. I have learned that the visualization process that I attempted during this research could have been a very strong component of this curriculum had the students had tools to follow through on reflecting on the implications
for those images as metaphors for themselves. It became clear that a visual image of the
metaphor is helpful not only to the author/artist of the metaphor, but also to the
reader/responder. By looking at an image we perceive its form, leading us to pay closer
attention to its appearance (colour, size, shape), component parts, the function of the
parts, and the relationship of the parts and whole to each other and to outside forces.
Students can also ask themselves, “When I extend my metaphor does it still say what I
want it to mean? Can I accept it or do I need to change it? Can I adapt it slightly or do I
need an entirely new metaphor?”

If students have had sufficient practice extending and reflecting on metaphors,
their puppet metaphors (the metaphors for their personal challenges) should more easily
connote significant meaning for their lives. They should have skills to help one another
extend the metaphors. This might involve asking about the form, function, or condition
as I did by helping Emma extend and clarify the metaphor of her heart as a rose. I began
by asking the students what parts might we look at in Emma’s rose to compare to Emma
as a person. One suggested the petals; another suggested the stem and thorns. I
proceeded to guide Emma to extend these parts into her life by asking her which part of
her heart would the thorns be? Emma replied, I thought my thorns were protecting the
heart…”

Just as Emma’s rose evolved from a metaphor for her heart to a metaphor for her
whole self within her challenge, it could continue to evolve. When asked about how the
rose represented her challenge she replied, “I want my flower to start blooming,
changing…and I feel that it’s rooted to the ground…it’s really hard to change.” Emma’s
metaphoric paradigm could have benefited from further extension. For example, while
Emma saw the roots as being limiting, a friend might have asked, "What is the function of the roots?" By beginning with their function within a plant, she might see her roots as something that nourishes her, or perhaps she would find that she is not rooted to the ground after all and the metaphor would change.

Through reflection on the puppet's development, metaphors can continue to evolve. Emma's rose may begin to draw strength from her roots and learn more about them. Perhaps Jake's Mr. Potato Head, the lazy couch potato, would fear baking, frying, and mashing enough to get out of the house. Conversely, he may realize that even by planting himself in one place and growing roots he will eventually grow and bloom, given sufficient grounding and nutrients. By seeing the exploration of metaphors as spiral processes, the puppet presentations may exhibit growing evolution of the self. Ideally, the evolution will continue beyond the school setting.
VI. Embracing growth

Educators, especially those who love learning and who push themselves as learner/teachers, at times develop fire-in-the-belly curricula. For me, this puppetry unit was such curriculum. I was extremely passionate about using art as a medium for self-discovery and social activism, but had minimal experience working and instructing in the field of puppetry or teaching about metaphor, meaning-making, and personal ideology. I had had no prior experience that prepared me for where this research would take me.

Once I was engaging with the lived curriculum, I felt poorly prepared to proceed. Despite beginning the research process with some learning objectives in mind, I still wanted to leave space for students to investigate their own understandings, passions, and concerns. The dichotomy between having clear direction and fostering an open-ended learning process often left me confused, frustrated, and anxious about conceiving of the next step in learning. As a result of not having clear ideas about the “what” or the “how” of facilitating learning in a new area, I found that I became less flexible in my teaching, instead clinging to established patterns. So rather than practicing more democratic teaching, I grew less confident and my teaching practice became more teacher-centered, imposing rather than inspiring inquiry. I have seen similar transformations of other idealistic teachers, especially early in their careers, as they attempt to implement new curricula and find themselves in unfamiliar educational territory unsure of how to proceed. It is natural for such experiences to feel uncomfortable, especially when they may risk not only one’s confidence as a teacher, but also one’s image or standing in a generally results-oriented school system.

4 Here, I am referring to units of study that are based in the passions of the educator, although not necessarily on prior experience or training.
Even though they may not emerge as entirely cohesive units, pedagogical innovations open possibilities for exploring epistemologies and developing highly significant and motivating curricula. Rather than discouraging teacher-initiated innovation, educational systems should support teachers as they strive to bring increasingly relevant curricula to students in more coherent ways. Throughout my struggles during this inquiry I was lucky to have the support of my research committee and cooperating teacher, to have time for reflection, and to find guidance in literature on inquiry. However, not all classroom teachers have such luxuries. School administration and teacher education programs must realize that many teachers are innovators and create conditions that support reflective practice. Teachers need support to inquire into their understandings of relevancy, to develop curricula based on relevant rationales consistent with their educational philosophies, and to practice engaging strategies for facilitating learning with which to implement their lived curricula. Through their commitment to growth as an educator, young learners gain the possibility of a teacher who truly values learning and personal development and who sees the value in each individual’s journey.

Throughout my data collection and analysis I learned that my journey, even when it does not meet my or others’ expectations, is not wrong, that no journey is wrong. Not only does this understanding contribute to my personal and professional development, but it also is a gift to my future colleagues and students who will be exposed to a conception of learning that values process, and who will be encouraged in their own reflective practices. However, the understandings I drew from my research are not all directly applicable to others. Some learning must be attained through experience. No piece of writing, for example, will teach confidence or trust. The value of living inquiry can only
be learned through the actual process of a reflective experience. I do not believe that I can
give this knowledge to others; perhaps I can only support them in their own journeys
through challenges.

My experience may serve as reassurance to other first-time researchers and
teacher-inquirers as they encounter what they perceive as stumbling blocks. Throughout
both my data collection and my data analysis, I experienced many occasions in which I
felt misdirected or incapable of finding “the right answer”. I searched in other research
for reassurance that my feelings were normal. I was terrified of data analysis because it
meant that I would have to look at my data. I was sure I would find them to be void of
anything positive or valuable, or worse that they would prove my incompetence. I
learned that my paralysis stemmed from the very common experience of impostor
syndrome. Because of my fear of being “found out”, I lost sight of what I needed to do.
At the same time I didn’t understand why I couldn’t write. While I am still critical of the
pedagogy that I practiced and of the time I spent struggling to write, I now see that every
step I took was exactly what I needed for me to learn. When I found I was unable to
write, it was often because I needed to gain a different sort of insight by reviewing data,
brainstorming, or art making. With distance from these experiences for reflection I see
that I learned a great deal from every step in the process about myself, about learning,
and about facilitating learning. As I continue to inquire into lifelong learning, agency,
and confidence, I ask, “How do we teach students, and ourselves for that matter, to trust
in the knowledge that they already possess?” How do we support innovation, showing us
and others that even the hardest struggles, those that appear the least fruitful and leave us
the most defeated, contribute a great deal to our identities?
We should be celebrating these struggles rather than fearing them! Innovative educators who face a lack of support often find themselves too drained to continue pursuing innovation. By encouraging and facilitating experiences in reflective practice for pre-service or in-service teachers, teachers could develop skills and interest in teacher inquiry. Practice supporting one another and giving critical and constructive criticism could transform teachers' and students' experiences in school. While teacher buy-in may require a cultural shift, those who have the support of the administration to develop teacher-initiated inquiries into educational practices are much more likely to take risks and share their experiences freely. A network of educators who engage honestly and critically without being judgmental would encourage on-going professional development. Groups of critical friends within the education community can support one another to take risks, work collaboratively, and remain committed to praxis as they work through more challenging aspects of emergent curricula and pedagogy. In praxis, innovation is followed by reflection, and reflection is followed
by the opportunity to implement the ideas that emerged through reflection. In this cyclical learning process there is no failure, only opportunities for growth.

Reflecting on my own experience, I felt somewhat thwarted by my inability to return to the research site to for a second cycle. I desired to know that my learning could evolve into teaching practices that would inspire my students. Based on my findings, I created an educator’s art group to provide ongoing opportunities to practice facilitating inquiries into meaning-making and personal development. This group has provided me with feedback for my ideas and evidence of the power of their potential. I strive to engage others in on-going learning processes that allow them to be the conductors in their personal and professional development.

Through my attempts at curricular development I have learned much about pedagogy. Altering the curriculum without a reflective pedagogical foundation maintains the pedagogical establishment. When curricular innovations evolve from pedagogical transformation, those changes are consistent with consistent with educator’s beliefs, and therefore have stronger impact and commitment. Throughout the process of writing this thesis and incorporating the learning into my understanding of education, I have begun to see the importance of truly breaking free from the empty vessel metaphor and sharing the role of “learner” with those in my classroom. Being a learner has helped me understand my role as facilitating learning, as opposed to “teaching”, and has altered my approach to interactions in (and outside of) the classroom. Central to facilitating learning is being a learner and respecting the process of other learners. I now bring to all teaching/learning situations openness to knowing the passions and ideas of other learners, and opportunities for them to share and expand upon those ideas. Reaching this understanding could only
have occurred through repositioning myself as a learner and inquirer. My openness to ongoing learning about learning has acquainted me with well-developed alternative education sites and un-schooling movements that are have strong (while often loosely-defined) philosophies of and democratic, inquiry-based approaches to learning. My work was informed only minimally by their ideas, although our ideas ultimately seem quite similar. Perhaps I can offer a bit of a new perspective to those who have been thinking about the application of democratic learning practices for longer than I have; however, I see my work more as a bridge between those who work in formal, public or private, educational systems that find some discomfort in the approach to learning in which they take part, and the world of possibility that can be (and is being) created.

As I sat in front of a computer writing theory, I realized that the aspects of this inquiry that most excited and motivated me were the direct applications to my teaching practice. Without practice, there is no need for theory. Therefore, I bring my learning back into my current practice as an art methods instructor for pre-service elementary school teachers. I consider not simply what I think teachers should know, but also who student teachers are, what they already know, and how they can use their knowledge to pursue paths that are generative and exciting to them. I am committed to a learning partnership that ensures pre-service experiences with me do not treat them as empty vessels being filled, so that as teachers we can all be more than full vessels being drained. I have been developing and practicing an approach to learning that creates opportunities for reflection and that values process, not simply product. I see my job as an educator as encouraging questions that push students and student teachers to continuously grow and feel powerful in their own creative processes, not only art, but in all sites of learning.
I now see that understanding is evolving rather than occurring at a definable moment in time. In-service teachers, pre-service teachers, and youth all require time to
pursue their own inquiries. Within any inquiry, my own or my students', it is often
difficult to see the forest for the trees, and perhaps distance in time and space is beneficial
in understanding a question or the possibilities it creates. Rather than being pressured to
develop and present results within a short period of time, perhaps time and space might
be allotted for other types of learning experiences before returning to the initial inquiry.
With a personally relevant inquiry in mind, the reflection and learning are likely to
continue through other activities. Further research into these ideas might involve
pedagogy specifically designed to support cyclical inquiry, encouraging reflection and
reconsideration with youth, pre-service teacher, and/or in-service teacher participants.
Such research would consider the impact of presenting learning in such as way that
questions beget questions, simple answers to questions are perceived as closed doors on
thinking, and education opens doors.

Most of us are trained to approach challenge by seeking and directly applying a
plan of action designed as a solution. So often an inability to immediately solve a
problem is seen as a weakness. We make the struggles we experience mean something
about us: we are not smart enough; we are never good enough. This research is
significant because it values simply being within a challenge and acknowledges the
insight that experience can bring. The conclusions I have drawn from this inquiry create
the possibility of freedom from the judgments of the problem-solution paradigm. They
reject the assumption that we already know the answer (and either we refuse to try it or it
just does not work) and instead encourage movement beyond old ways of thinking or
being by using art as a language to help understand and transform the metaphoric lenses
that control perception.
This research contributes critical literacy studies by supporting the need for and extending the understanding of multiliteracies. Literacy is not just about reading texts; it is about reading the world. Before we can communicate with the world at large, we must learn to make sense of ourselves, then ourselves within the context of our immediate community, and then ourselves and our immediate community within the global community. Due to the nature of globalization and the ubiquity of the media, the global community and the messages it imparts are closer than we can imagine. The Western paradigms of “good” and “bad” (or “evil” as is becoming increasingly legitimimized by the U.S. government) are exported all over the world. Likewise, Westerners are taught of their relationship to manufactured conceptions of the “East” or of the “Global South” or of the “Third World.” Each of these contrived locales carries specific connotations, and how we choose to conceive of the metaphoric “other” largely determines our perception of our relationships and responsibilities. We also identify ourselves in relationship to the conception of the “other”, meaning in terms of what we are not. In opposition to Americans’ self-definition, Canadians define themselves by supporting gay marriage, not supporting preemptive attacks, and supporting the U.N. and its Universal Declaration of Human Rights. This is not to say that either all Canadians or all Americans will agree on any one issue. These are simply metaphors, representations, or lenses that provide acceptable and commonly used understandings about who each people is as a nation.

In creating responsible and active citizens through education we must be sensitive to the subjectivity of our worldviews and should provide students with tools to critically investigate the impact of the various messages they receive from different sites. In doing so we begin to see possibility in the vast array of perspectives in the world rather than
seeing that we are trapped by the limiting messages of any one community. By addressing the messages learners are told and tell themselves, we equip members of our community to make critical decisions about all challenges they face, rather than telling them what challenges are deserving of their attention. Ideally, such a learning process is cyclical, beginning with the personal and spiraling outward into the individual's relationship to his or her family; community; and world, and again returning to the personal.
"It's hard," She thought to herself, "when you can see who you want to be, but you aren't sure how to be her. You know... you can see it so clearly in your mind, but then you feel trapped inside your own head and you can't seem to get out."
"You just gotta step outside!" she finally resolved. And so she did.
Outside the World was bright. Very, very bright. And full of new sights and sounds and sensations.

Yes, Outside was an exciting place to be and the path was clear!
She set out along her new path for quite a way.

"It will be a long journey," she worried, "and how will I even know if I'm There?"

Something new and sweet called out to her. "Oh," she thought, "Perhaps, it's over There." "Perhaps," she thought, "I could find a way over and see."
So off she leapt.

SPLASH!
The first few steps left her soaking wet...
...but refreshed!
"Oh well. That's okay," She thought. "I'll be There soon. I'll just take another leap."
SMACK!

"Ouch! That really hurt," She cried.
"I don't see how I will ever get there now. What am I going to do?" She lamented.
She did the only thing that made sense to her. She got up and took another leap, and...
...landed firmly on the next rock! Hooray!
Feeling more surefooted, She took one more step...

and another...

and another...until finally she landed on the solid shore.

(Almost.)
"Well," She thought, looking about, "This isn't all bad. I guess I'm Here now..."
And so She rested.

Nutrients and water soaked into her veins as She rooted herself down, down, down into the Earth. The air and sun nourished her spirit and helped her to blossom and thrive. She reached up, up, up to the sky and took in all she could.

"Here I feel full of life!" She marveled.
As time went by her branches became heavier and heavier with the weight of life.

"How did I ever get Here?" She wondered. "Where am I anyway?"

Pretty soon She just couldn't stand it anymore. She squeezed her eyes tight and shook and shook and shook.

"I'm all alone Here!! I just can't do this anymore!!" She cried.
When the last of her leaves had fallen, She opened her eyes.

"Oh, no!" She sobbed. "Now what have I done?"

She grew very, very quiet and crawled back inside herself.
Slowly, outside sounds began to creep in.

When she looked around she saw Life reaching out all around her!

"Funny," She mused, "I hadn't noticed it before."
References


Appendices

Appendix A—Visual metaphor: Student as empty vessel, teacher as teapot

Banking metaphor

From Friedman, S. (2006), *A hand in the action*
Appendix B—Cycles of Action Researcher Inquiry

Living the Curriculum

Developing theory into curriculum

Reflecting on the classroom practice to further develop or refine our pedagogy

Reflecting our educational philosophy into how we live our lives.

Developing meaningful and relevant pedagogy

Reflecting our life values and experiences into our pedagogy

Striving to live life in accordance to our principles

From Friedman, S. (2006), *A hand in the action*
Appendix C—Cycles of Artistic Inquiry

- Making art
- Developing metaphor into artwork
- Reflecting on the artmaking practice to further develop or refine our metaphor
- Reflecting our artwork and metaphors into how we live our lives
- Developing meaningful and relevant metaphor
- Striving to live life in accordance to our principles

From Friedman, S. (2006), *A hand in the action*
Appendix D—Cycles of Teacher Inquiry

Engaging learners to inquire into and express personal beliefs and ideas

Planning opportunities for learners to more meaningfully explore their own identity, beliefs, and ideas

Considering meaningful and relevant approaches to meeting the needs of learners based on what they have expressed

Listening and reflecting on the ideas that learners express

Reflecting our life values and experiences into our relationships with other learners

Reflecting what we have learned from listening to other learners

Striving to live life in accordance with our principles

From Friedman, S. (2006), *A hand in the action*
Appendix E—Visual metaphor: Teacher as scientist, student as chemical

From Friedman, S. (2006), *A hand in the action*
Appendix F—Visual Metaphor: Student as plant, teacher as stake ties

From Friedman, S. (2006), *A hand in the action*
Appendix G—Visual metaphor: Education as three sisters of Native gardening

From Friedman, S. (2006), *A hand in the action*
Appendix H

**Fallacies of the Linear Conception of Learning**

- **Embarkation**
  - Ignorance
  - Not really ignorant to begin with
  - We all possess prior knowledge that helps us make sense of new experiences

- **Path**
  - May not be a direct path
  - Even paths that appear to be identical are likely to be vastly divergent from one individual to the next
  - We know that not all students will learn the material just because we have taught it

- **Destination**
  - Understanding
  - Knowledge/Enlightenment
  - This path does not guarantee learning
  - OR
  - We may learn but continue to search, feeling we have never made it to our “destination”

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From Friedman, S. (2006), *A hand in the action*